The New Criterion

November 1996

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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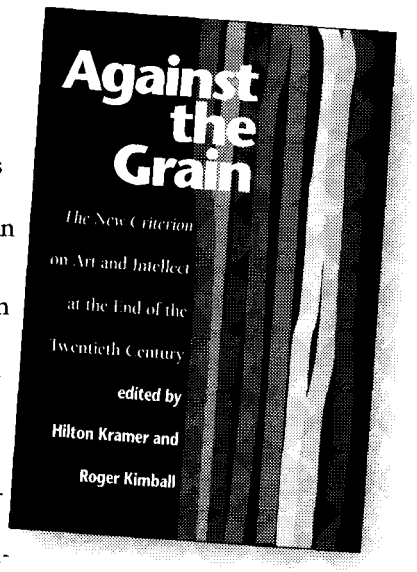

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The New Criterion *November 1996*

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Notes & Comments: November 1996

Legislating history

October 9, 1996, was a dark day for New York State. On that day, the forces of political correctness, historical revisionism, and victim politics won a stunning legislative victory. Henceforth, the law in New York stipulates that students must be taught not only about the Irish potato famine of the 1840s (in itself a reasonable enough stipulation) but that the famine was *deliberately caused by the British*.

It pains us to acknowledge it, but the instrument of this outrage was the Republican governor of New York, George E. Pataki. Senator Michael Hoblock and Assemblyman Joseph Crowley sponsored the legislation, but Governor Pataki signed it into law. According to a press release issued by his office, this is what the Governor said:

> History teaches us that the Great Irish Hunger was not the result of a massive failure of the Irish potato crop but rather was the result of a deliberate campaign by the British to deny the Irish people the food they needed to survive.

"*History teaches us*"? No, Governor Pataki, history teaches us no such thing. Allow us to introduce you to *phytophthora infestans*, the devastating potato fungus. In *Modern Ireland 1600–1972*, the historian R. F. Foster observes that the fungus first attacked the Irish potato crop in the autumn of 1845, "operating with cruel rapidity and unpredictability in moist, mild conditions, . . . reducing the crop to rottenness." *Phytophthora infestans*, in case there is any confusion on this point, is not an Englishman, nor even a British subject.

As Professor Foster points out, there had been serious potato famines in Ireland at least since the eighteenth century, including fourteen partial or complete crop failures between 1816 and 1842. But between 1845 and 1849, the devastation wrought by the potato blight was immense. There is some debate about the number of casualties that can be attributed to the famine; most authorities seem to place the number at about one million; whatever the figure, Professor Foster is surely correct that "no amount of disagreement can conceal the devastating extent of depopulation or the horrific conditions in which lives were lost." The question that has preoccupied historians, he notes, is what the government could have done to stop it.

One thing that history *does* teach us is that, despite the hostilities that existed between England and Ireland, the governments of Sir Robert Peel and Lord John Russell did a great deal to address the misery caused by the famine. Not that their actions were

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above criticism: far from it. But they did establish government-run relief programs, price controls, food depots, and various public works. These remedies were inconsistently implemented and, in hindsight, may seem woefully inadequate. But the fact remains that, as Mary E. Daly, professor of modern Irish history at University College, Dublin, noted in her essay "The Operations of Famine Relief, 1845–57," "every famine alert appears to have enlisted assistance from both government sources and private charities."

In other words, far from being "the result of a deliberate campaign by the British to deny the Irish people the food they needed to survive," as Governor Pataki asserted, many British politicians and agencies endeavored in good faith to help. Were their policies adequate to the task? Obviously not. Did political squabbling, greed, and other factors interfere with good intentions? Undoubtedly. But Professor Daly was right to warn that we should "beware of the omniscience of hindsight or of adopting a late-twentieth-century attitude of moral superiority" when attempting to understand the Irish famine. "It is easy," she observes, "to be wise after the event." To say that a relief program did not entirely succeed is not to say that its architects are therefore guilty of criminal malfeasance. Anyone who doubts this needs only to compare what happened in the Irish famine with the many instances the twentieth century affords in which governments really did embark on a "deliberate campaign" to destroy a population.

And this brings us to the most shameful aspect of this latest effort to legislate history: the implication that British behavior during the potato famine is comparable to the atrocities perpetrated by totalitarian regimes. The Governor's press release notes that the law requires that the Irish famine be studied in mandatory courses "in patriotism, citizenship and human rights issues, with particular attention to be devoted to the study of genocide, slavery and the Holocaust." Genocide? Slavery? The Holocaust? The inescapable suggestion is that the British response to the famine belongs in this list—that it was, perhaps, akin to Stalin's forced collectivization of the Ukrainian peasants in the 1920s in which millions were murdered or died of starvation.

Thus Senator Michael Hoblock, speaking in the grammatically challenged language of victim politics, praised the new legislation as follows: "Being from Ukrainian ancestral ties, I am keenly aware of the necessity to inform New York's children of the sacrifices and injustices suffered by many of New York's ethnic population." And what, pray tell, do the "sufferings and injustices suffered by many of New York's ethnic population" have to do with the case at hand? Nothing. But Senator Hoblock does manage to insinuate, falsely, that there is some connection between the case of the Irish potato famine and the infernal machinery of totalitarianism.

In the press release announcing this legislation, Governor Pataki said that it was "imperative" that the youth of New York "receive a full appreciation of the lessons of history, however troubling they may be." Quite right. We entirely agree. Which is why it behooves us to point out to the Governor that one of the most vivid lessons of the twentieth century is the folly of attempting to rewrite history for the sake of political expediency. The Soviets, he will recall, already tried that. The moral is that politicians have no business attempting to legislate history. The truth waits upon no political party or vested interest. The effort to bend historical truth to the demands of ideology is out of place in a democratic polity. This latest effort to distort the historical record for the sake of politically correct victim politics is an unconscionable blunder. We hope that it will soon be corrected.

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Nothing sacred

Is there any aspect of our cultural life that will remain unsullied by the filth of the so-called avant-garde? We say "so-called" because it has been clear for some time that what masquerades as the artistic avant-garde today is mostly an insidious form of moral insurrection that poaches on the prestige of art in order to carry out with impunity its raids on custom, decency, and standards of taste.

The large-scale results of this assault are too obvious and too numerous to require comment. We have all of us to some extent become inured to a culture where viciousness and depravity are simply taken for granted, like some hideous wallpaper that we have lived with for years. It still happens, however, that some particularly rebarbative incident or phenomenon will break in upon our moral anesthesia and, at least momentarily, shatter our insensitivity. Curiously, it is often something offhand and, in itself, quite insignificant that has this power of moral reveille.

So it was recently when a new edition of Richmond Lattimore's translation of the New Testament came to our notice. Mr. Lattimore, who died in his late seventies in 1984, was best known for his stark, sinewy translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Late in his life, he also published translations of the Gospels and the Book of Revelation and, a few years later, the Acts and Letters of the Apostles. These have now been brought together and published as a single volume by Northpoint Press, a division of the distinguished publishing house Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

What caught our attention was the jacket that Farrar, Straus decided to supply for the book. Designed by Chip Kidd, one of the trendiest and most talented desginers in the book trade today, the jacket features an excruciatingly gruesome photograph of part of a man's face. Slightly larger than life-size, the detail shows a man's left eye—open but unseeing—and part of his cheek; an angry glaze of flith—dried blood or worse—encrusts the visage. Clearly, this revolting photograph is meant to depict Jesus.

The tastelessness of embellishing Richmond Lattimore's deeply felt translations of scripture with this ghastly image would have been sufficiently outrageous no matter who the photographer was. When it turns out that the photographer was in fact Andres Serrano, then jacket design is not merely outrageous but also an act of calculated insult and effrontery. Serrano, of course, was catapulted to inglorious celebrity in the late 1980s with his photograph "Piss Christ," which depicts a plastic crucifix suspended in the photographer's urine. The startlingly blasphemous character of that image earned Mr. Serrano the censure of many; but it also earned him the wild approbation of the cultural and moral insurrectionists, who promptly canonized him as a patron saint. The photograph that Mr. Kidd chose to adorn the Farrar, Straus New Testament is called "The Morgue (Hacked to Death II)." It is perhaps even more repulsive than Mr. Serrano's experiments with bodily fluids. No doubt for Mr. Kidd the picture was meant as a kind of statement; for Farrar, Straus it is a shameful collusion with decadence. Richmond Lattimore, God rest him, must be rolling in his grave.

"The eclipse of listening"

Writing recently in the book pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, the constitutional scholar Hadley Arkes noted that

> in malls throughout the country, managers have found a simple device for preventing teenagers from taking over the public square:

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> They pipe in Mozart quartets and the youngsters flee. Something in their souls cannot bear Mozart, which is another way of saying that their souls have been formed by another style of music.

Indeed. No one would mistake the accoustic assaults of groups like Nine Inch Nails or Smashing Pumpkins for Mozart, or anything like Mozart. Professor Arkes made this observation at the beginning of his review of *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, Robert Bork's new book about the culture wars. It was exactly the right anecdote for the subject. For the relevance of music—or perhaps we should say the relevance of the perversion of music—to the contemporary culture wars cannot be overstated. At least since Plato, thinkers have recognized the uncanny power of music to educate the emotions—or "soul," as Professor Arkes, with Plato, puts it. And like all education, the indelible lessons music teaches can form root emotional habits for better or for worse. Today's youth, reared on rock 'n' roll, flee from Mozart because for them the sense of order, articulately contained passion, and emotional delicacy that Mozart communicates are distasteful, unintelligible, or both. What they reject in music they also reject in their lives—with the predictable results that we see all around us.

What has happened to music in our culture? Anyone concerned with the fate of our civilization must ponder this complex question. It is not easily answered. Rock certainly represents one species of musical perversion: music decapitated or lobotomized. But there are other perversions and detours as well. The English philosopher Roger Scruton traces some of them below in "The Eclipse of Listening," his important contribution to our series on "The Future of the European Past," which in this issue temporaily shifts its focus to deal with the fate of a specific art form.

The "root cause" of our musical crisis, Professor Scruton suggests, is the "same as the root cause of so many other crises during our century: namely, the rise of the intelligentsia as a priesthood of unbelievers." In this sense, Professor Scruton argues, the suspicion of tonality is like the Marxist's suspicion of private property or the existentialist's suspicion of the bourgeois family, "part of the almost universal alienation of Western intellectuals from the legacy of bourgeois culture during the late nineteenth century: . . . an act of rebellion against the only way we have of making sense of things." Rock music is only part of the story. As Professor Scruton shows, the real problem is reinvigorating a culture in which the spiritual legacy of Mozart continues to speak to us—not merely as a historical artifact but soul to soul. Such a culture is necessary not only for the preservation of what Mozart accomplished, but also for the possibility of what any future Mozarts might accomplish.

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The future of the European past: III

The eclipse of listening

by Roger Scruton

Music exists in every human society. In its primary forms of dance, march, and collective song, it is a participatory activity whose purpose is often religious or bellicose. The throbbing drum of the war dance is the spirit of the tribe, in which the warrior loses his identity so as to become one with the collective will. The hymn is the collective voice of the congregation as it communes with its god.

In Western civilization, music of a quite different kind has gradually pushed the old participatory forms to one side. Our musical culture depends on a radical divide between performer and listener. For us the act of listening takes place in silence, often in the hushed and reverential atmosphere of a concert hall. To sing, hum, gesticulate, or tap your feet in time is not just bad manners. It is a violation of the sacred ritual, which merits nothing less than expulsion from the divine presence into the cacophonous street outside.

Cultural historians have begun to ask themselves when this momentous transition from a participatory to a listening culture occurred. As James Johnson shows in *Listening in Paris* (1995), his brilliant examination of the growth of opera as a spectacle in eighteenth-century France, it was only by degrees that audiences learned to fall silent. The rise of the instrumental "concert" in the late Renaissance, and the very names of "sonata" and "symphony," suggest a gradual dawning of the new conception of music as sound that deserves attention for its own sake alone. Shakespeare's many beautiful invocations of the power of music suggest the wonder with which music was received by a man who had newly learned to put day-to-day interests aside, in order to listen.

The culture of listening has not been confined to Western civilization. We find parallels in India, Bali, and China. But an additional factor has enriched our musical experience. This is the discovery of tonality as a device for uniting the melodic and harmonic potential of every musical element. I call this a discovery, not just because it arose only in some parts of the world, but more importantly because, wherever it arose, it brought about an irreversible change in the way music was conceived. Before the arrival of tonality, music is confined to monodic melody, supported by rhythmic movement. There is no doubt that the monodic forms of music may achieve the greatest subtlety and invention—witness Gregorian chant and the Indian raga. But tonality brings with it a third dimension of development, so that music loses its free and improvisatory character—the character of linear movement—and finds itself bound by the laws of harmonic succession. Voices can now be combined, and the harmonic sequences that emerge from this have a logic of their own, constraining and constrained by the melodic line.

The death of tonality was prophesied by

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Arnold Schönberg, who then (like other modern prophets) attempted to produce the condition he foretold. In musicological circles it has become a cliché that tonality is a cliché—in other words, that its effects are empty, exhausted, and false. And if tonality collapses, what remains of the Western tradition? How should we relate to the music of the past if its very language is no longer seriously usable, but usable only in inverted commas, as in David Del Tredici's *Final Alice*, or John Corigliano's postmodern opera, *Last Days at Versailles*?

Although our musical culture has passed through a period of acute crisis, it does not seem to me that this crisis was caused either by the death of tonality, or by the rise of the atonal experiments that attempted to replace it. On the contrary, it was caused precisely by the *suspicion* of tonality—a suspicion that should be seen as part of the almost universal alienation of Western intellectuals from the legacy of bourgeois culture during the late nineteenth century. The suspicion of tonality, like Marx's suspicion of private property, or Sartre's suspicion of the bourgeois family, or the abstractionist suspicion of figurative painting, should be seen for what it is: an act of rebellion against the only way we have of making sense of things. The root cause of our musical crisis is the same as the root cause of so many other crises during our century: namely, the rise of the intelligentsia as a priesthood of unbelievers. The time has come for a reassessment of tonality and of the impetuous criticisms to which it has all but succumbed.

There is a tendency among ethnomusicologists to describe tonality as "Western tonality," implying that it is one idiom among many, of no universal significance. This attitude has been reinforced by modern compositional techniques, which attempt to retain polyphony while discarding the laws of tonal harmony. The "emancipation of the dissonance" that Schönberg announced has also been taken as the superseding of tonality. We have been encouraged to see tonality as a passing idiom whose authority is dependent upon a vanishing musical culture. But this attitude fails to do justice to the underlying appeal of tonal harmony.

The interesting thing is not that tonality arose in the West, but that its discoveries cannot be made available without being adopted—often, it is true, to the detriment of the local music culture (as in Indian Bunjee music), but always with a greedy sense that *this* is what music needs for its enrichment. For three hundred years, Japan

How should we relate to the music of the past if its very language is no longer seriously usable, but usable only in inverted commas? The suspicion of tonality, like Marx's suspicion of private property, should be seen for what it is: an act of rebellion against the only way we have of making sense of things.

remained cut off from Western art music, locked in its grisly imitations of the Chinese court orchestras, dutifully producing sounds as cacophonous to local ears as the croaking of jackdaws. Within a few decades of the Meiji restoration, young Japanese had all but forgotten their traditions and were playing Mozart and Beethoven on home-produced pianos with the same relish as their Western contemporaries, and dreaming of symphonies and concertos that they would add to the classical repertoire. Within half a century the bamboo flute and the koto had become exotic addenda to the symphony orchestra.

Indeed, Western music is a symbol of Western civilization itself. It is the perfect expression of the "Faustian" spirit that Spengler identified as the prime mover of

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our achievements: the spirit of restless discovery, which must always go deeper into the cause and the meaning of things. Not without reason did Thomas Mann choose music as the preoccupation of his modern Dr. Faustus. And in endowing his hero with the despairing thought that tonality has exhausted itself, that nothing now remains for music but a "taking back" of its greatest utterances, Mann found the perfect symbol for his belief that Western civilization has at last come to an end.

Announcing its own demise has been such an enduring mark of Western civilization that we should approach Mann's thesis with a measure of Faustian skepticism. The amazing fact is that, notwithstanding the attempted suicide of the First World War, the barbarism of Nazi Germany, and the malign nothingness of Communism, a kind of civilization endures in the Western hemisphere. True, it is a civilization without a religious heart, and many would agree with Spengler that its days are therefore numbered. Nevertheless, unlike the other civilizations whose remnants lie strewn across the battlefield of the twentieth century, it is still breathing. And one sign of this is that people listen to music, perform music for themselves and others, and discriminate between the works that we ought to listen to and those that we ought to avoid.

In this at least Thomas Mann was right: if we wish to gauge the health of Western civilization, then we should study its musical culture. How much remains of that tradition of listening, and with what ease and conviction are new works being added to its repertoire? When Schönberg first devoted his great intellect to the overthrow of tonality it was partly as a gesture of defiance toward the audiences of his day, whose habit of disrupting the concerts in which his innovative music was first performed showed how far the tacit understanding between composer and listener had already broken down. By 1946, Schönberg was writing as though the audience had no legitimate part to play in the creation and understanding of music, and as though it entered the equation only by overhearing a dialogue between the composer and his inner voice. In his essay called "Heart and Brain in Music," Schönberg wrote that

> those who compose because they want to please others, and have audiences in mind, are not real artists. They are not the kind of men who are driven to say something whether or not there exists one person who likes it, even if they themselves dislike it. They are not creators who must open the valves in order to relieve the interior pressure of a creation ready to be born. They are more or less skillful entertainers who would renounce composing if they did not find listeners.

It is as though the priest, disgusted with his sinful congregation, has turned his back on them, so as to communicate with God alone.

Schönberg's attitude to the audience is of a piece with his atonal music. Tonality, for Schönberg and his followers, had exhausted its potential, and its principle devices had "become banal." It was no longer possible for a composer seriously to make use of the tonal idiom, since to do so would be to compromise the demands of inner truthfulness, to play to the gallery, and to utter musical platitudes whose appeal to the uninstructed masses condemned them as unfit for spiritual consumption. In effect, the listening culture had turned against itself. By admitting too many to its precinct, the temple had been defiled.

With those thoughts, Schönberg helped to launch modern music on a course of self-destruction. For it was tonality, with its unique potential to synthesize the melody and the harmonic dimensions, that made counterpoint and voice-leading intelligible to the ordinary musical ear, and so made it possible for people not otherwise versed in musical theory to follow the argument of a symphony or a string quartet, and to understand the message addressed through tones to their emotions. Take away tonality,

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and you remove that which makes polyphony accessible to all but the experts. And an art addressed only to experts is an art detached from the culture that provides its frame of reference. It is a neurasthenic art, spectral and rarefied, cut off from the lifeblood that only an audience can renew.

Schönberg, as is well known, set out to find an alternative to tonal organization. He wrote:

> It is evident that abandoning tonality can be contemplated only if other satisfactory means for coherence and articulation present themselves. If, in other words, one could write a piece that does not use the advantages offered by tonality and yet unifies all elements so that their succession and relation are logically comprehensible.

This search for the "alternative," which began with atonal serialism, has led from one arcane experiment to another, to the point where the "logically comprehensible" is just that: comprehensible as logic, but not as music. It is possible for a mathematician, versed in set theory, to get a kick out of Milton Babbit's ingenious permutations of hexachords. But how many fragments of Babbit can be sung, whistled, or hummed with feeling? How many can be retained in the memory as music, or heard as polyphony is heard? The whole point of this music is that it should *not* be intelligible to the ordinary musical ear; it is there to create a barrier between the vulgar and the cognoscenti. The complaint is reasonably made, not only of set-theoretic music in the mold of Babbit, but also of the serial experiments of Schönberg and his school, that the intellectual order imposed on the music by the composer is not the order that we hear in it, when we hear it as music. It is an "encrypted" order, which is there for the expert, but that requires no *musical* experience for its decoding.

The defiance of the audience has extended from composer to performer. Indeed, the listening culture has been far more seriously damaged in recent years by the fossilization of performance than it has by the antibourgeois snobbery of the avant-garde. The cult of authentic performance has placed an ever thickening barrier between modern audiences and the classical tradition, so that they are now as much cut off from the past of our musical culture as they are from its present. A healthy musical culture is a culture of arrangements, transcriptions, and variations, in which the great works of the past are brought into living relation with modern ears.

Western music is a symbol of Western civilization itself. It is the perfect expression of the "Faustian" spirit, the spirit of restless discovery. Not without reason did Thomas Mann choose music as the preoccupation of his modern Dr. Faustus.

We should not ask: what sounds did Bach intend? For he was writing for an audience whose ears had not encountered the strains of romantic harmony, and who did not seek, in music, for a refuge from the din of modern life. We should ask, instead, what *would* Bach have wanted if he were living now? Would he have wanted his music to be played on authentic instruments, with baroque ornamentation, by musicians for whom this whole attempt is an exercise in scholarship? Or would he have wished us rather to finger out his fugues on a Steinway grand, and so bring them into relation with the great tradition of his successors?

In a living culture, the dead are still present among the living. But when a culture dies it is ceremonially buried in a museum. This burial has now been set in motion by the movement that insists on calling Buxtehude, Gibbons, Purcell, and Bach "early music," and subjecting them to special sanitized treatment, as though they must be

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touched with rubber gloves until finally mummified. This movement arose alongside musical modernism, and is complementary to it, being a reaction against the vulgarity and excess of popular taste.

If we wish to gauge the health of Western civilization, then we should study its musical culture. How much remains of that tradition of listening, and with what ease and conviction are new works being added to its repertoire?

Like the avant-garde, it is an attempt to wrest music from its adherents, and to reserve it for the experts.

The first step was to produce a "historical musicology" by squeezing music into the card index that Jacob Burckhardt and Heinrich Wölfflin had devised for the history of art. Henceforth, Bach was to be known as a baroque composer, just as Wren was a baroque architect, Rubens a baroque painter, and Milton a baroque poet. A concept invented by Burckhardt and Wölfflin in order to make a fine but important distinction between styles of architecture was elevated into a spiritual category, a *Zeitgeist*, and tied immovably to the chronology of Western culture. The effect of this label has been to imprison Bach's soul in the period that gave birth to his body, and to consign his music to a glass case in the museum of culture. The message is that we are no longer to enjoy this music, except through the filter of scholarship that will relieve us of its smell.

This scholarly approach is revealed in the very names of "authentic" performers: London Baroque Ensemble, Concentus Musicus, Musica Antiqua Köln, The Parley of Instruments, Collegium Aureum, the Consort of Musicke, the Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment, or such twee extravagances as Les Arts Florissants and La Grande Ecurie et la Chambre du Roi—a title worthy of Molière's *Précieuses ridicules*. The tired feeling that so many "authentic" performances induce can be compared to the atmosphere of a modern museum. A painting receives its final tribute from the scholar only in the form of a catalogue entry. Hence it is assumed that the proper place for a painting—even a minor painting—is not on the wall of a private house, where it can bestow joy and dignity on the life surrounding it, but in the gallery of some great museum, to be gaped at by weary multitudes as they wander from picture to picture in a state of well-informed fatigue. Likewise the works of the "early" or "ancient" composers have been confiscated by scholarship. They no longer have a place in our homes, played on our own familiar instruments, but are arranged behind the glass of authenticity, staring bleakly from the other side of an impassable screen.

The "authentic" performer, using "authentic" instruments, is imitating someone long since dead, and acting from aesthetic motives that were unavailable to his vanished predecessor. We might enjoy the result, but not as the original audience enjoyed the original performance. For the music is now presented to us under the aspect of its "pastness," and enjoyed partly on that account. In an essay called "The Musicologist and the Performer," the critic Richard Taruskin put the point another way:

> Even at their best and most successful, or especially at their best and most successful, historical reconstructionist performances are in no sense recreations of the past. They are quintissentially modern performances, modernist performances in fact, the product of an aesthetic wholly of our own era, no less time-bound than the performance styles they would supplant.

The reference to modernism is exact. For the authentic performance arises from a consciousness of the past that is available

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only to those who feel themselves irremediably sundered from it. It expresses an *anthropologist's* view of our musical culture, a view from outside, meticulous in its search for curious details, but sharing only distantly in the inward compulsion, the belief in itself, from which the culture grew. It therefore includes the same tacit reprimand of the ordinary musical ear that was delivered by the modernists. We now find ourselves surrounded by performers and composers who distance themselves from their musical inheritance, and who look with disdain on those who are still immersed in it as having no sense of the distinction between a cliché and an authentic gesture.

The most curious thing in all this is that both the avant-garde and the authentic performers, who began life as defiant nonconformists standing against the mass of musical mankind, have become the new establishment. It is they who receive the government grants, the international prizes, the accolades in the press, and the scholarly treatises devoted to their work. In Britain it is unheard of for a music critic to say of Harrison Birtwistle that his music is as factitious as it sounds, or that the work of some tonal composer like Robin Holloway or David Matthews ought to be rewarded as Birtwistle is rewarded, with subsidized performances all over the globe. And it is almost impossible now to attend a rousing performance of the Messiah in Mozart's version, with massed choirs and full symphony orchestra, notwithstanding the popularity that would certainly attend such an event. All performances of "early" music—which, by convention, means any music before Haydn and Mozart—are heavily censored both by those who sponsor them and by those who review then. Only in the privacy of your own home would you dare now to play the Bach violin concertos with the full vibrato and portamento that they need, and that have been publicly banned.

The retreat into "authentic" performance, and the rise of the modernist avant-garde, justified themselves as reactions against the depravity of popular taste. The public ear, it was said, had become so habituated to the devices of tonal music, and so dulled by

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over-lush performances, that a complete break was necessary, lest the distinction between good and bad taste be forgotten. Here is what Schönberg has to say, in *Harmonielehre*, about the diminished seventh chord—the chord that does such sterling work in Mozart and Weber, and which is still in the back of Wagner's mind as he explores the seventh chords of his later harmony:

> This uncommon, restless, undependable guest, here today, gone tomorrow, settled down, became a citizen, was retired a philistine. The chord had lost the appeal of novelty, hence it had lost its sharpness, but also its luster. It had nothing more to say in a new era. Thus it fell from the higher sphere of art music to the lower music for entertainment. There it remains, as a sentimental expression of sentimental concerns. It became banal and effeminate. Became banal! It was not so originally. It was sharp and dazzling. Today, though, it is scarcely used any more except in that mawkish stuff (*Schmachtliteratur*) that later always apes what was, in great art, the important event.

This is the judgment with which Western music has subsequently had to contend: the judgment that the once sublime effects of tonal music had "become banal," largely as a result of their over-exploitation by the *Gebrauchsmusik* of the market place. Henceforth, there must be a radical divide between

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"art music," which is to be listened to, and the "lower music for entertainment" that is to be merely overheard. Those composers who continue to use the language of tonality in order to reach the ears and the hearts of ordinary concertgoers, were angrily dismissed by the avant-garde as traitors to the sacred cause of music. It soon became a *sine qua non* of musical sincerity that the composer should write music that was inaccessible to the tonal ear. People had to *graduate* to the new music, by learning to hear it in a more erudite way.

Behind all such ideas we feel the groundswell of a new and growing force: the force of popular music, which had broken free of the classical tradition and jettisoned the laws of taste. It strikes us now as amazing that *The Magic Flute* was once a paradigm of popular music. It is no less amazing that the dance music of the Strauss family—in which the principles of harmony, counterpoint, and voice-leading are meticulously obeyed, with themes and motifs subject to intricate symphonic development—should have had the place in ordinary lives that is now filled by hip-hop, grunge, and heavy metal. At some point, however, the popular and the classical began to diverge, and it is an awareness of this, rather than any dissatisfaction with the tonal tradition, that motivated the censorious theories and experiments of the modernists. Bartók, Enescu, Cecil Sharp, and Grainger were similarly inspired in their search for the "authentic" folk traditions, conscious that the language of popular music had become debased, and that the devices borrowed so freely from the classical tradition were threatening to extinguish the still small voice of natural human society.

Although Schönberg first made the suggestion, it was his disciple Theodor Adorno who exalted the antagonism between serious and popular music into the central drama of our musical culture. For Adorno, popular music had, by borrowing the devices of tonality, also polluted them beyond redemption. Henceforth, these devices must be avoided, since any use of them would result in sentimental cliché. Popular music was part of the "false consciousness" of capitalist society, a means to reconcile the masses to their condition by coating it in sugar. Only the music of the avant-garde could free itself from the ideological miasma that had poisoned the realm of tonality.

Adorno was not referring to R.E.M., U2, or AC/DC. He was dismissing the melodious and sophisticated music of our parents and grandparents: Gershwin, Cole Porter, Rogers and Hammerstein, Louis Armstrong, Glenn Miller, and Ella Fitzgerald. This blanket condemnation did nothing to shore up the crumbling barriers of taste. For those things condemned by Adorno are better than anything that hits the charts today; by dismissing them as unfit for judgment, Adorno encouraged the belief that, outside the tradition of "art" music, anything goes.

At the same time, Adorno's intransigence raises in its most acute form the question whether our musical culture will survive. It can survive only if music has a place in our lives as an object of enjoyment and communication. If all that remains to us besides pop are sterilized performances of the classics, in which scholarship prevails over taste, or nightmarish "sound effects" from the modernist laboratory, then the tradition of "art" music is dead. Yet it was not dead when Adorno wrote his diatribes. Music still had a place in people's lives outside the concert hall. People sang and played the popular songs of the day, arranged them for jazz combo and marching band, incorporated them in their free improvisations at home and in church. The custom of hymn singing persisted, and provided to the musical ear an easy and faultless education in the rules of four-part harmony. Tonality was a familiar daily companion, and it is this, more than any injection of scholarship, that created the musically literate audiences that abounded in our cities. It is precisely the music that Adorno despised which opened the ears of the general public to the classical masterpieces. And it is the loss of this repertoire of half-serious music,

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through which the language of tonality was effortlessly internalized, that has led to the eclipse of listening.

Again: the crisis of our musical culture does not, in my view, stem from the collapse of tonality. It stems from the quite peculiar condition in which music has been put by this loss of its half-serious variety, and by the consequent disappearance of the judgment of taste from ordinary listening.

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The sundering of "highbrow" from "lowbrow," "classical" from "popular," has left a gap between the language of serious music and the ears of the young—a gap that was once filled with hymns, carols, and Broadway musicals, but which is now empty except for the works of Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, whose popularity, however, is a continuing reminder of the musical starvation in which most people live. This no man's land between high and popular culture was vacated only recently, and the atonal modernists must take much of the blame. Debussy bequeathed his harmonies to jazz, and jazz its rhythms to Stravinsky. Gershwin, Milhaud, Constant Lambert, and Bernstein wrote music that is neither highbrow nor lowbrow, while even the Broadway musical is grounded in harmony and counterpoint. The long tradition of musical utterance, which enabled our parents to hum with equal facility an aria by Mozart or a melody by Nat "King" Cole, was a precious icon of humanity. You can hear its echoes still in The Beatles or Buddy Holly, and to sing or move to this music is to take one step across the divide between popular and classical culture. You are beginning to think and feel *musically*—with an awareness of the voice not as a sound only, but as an expression of the soul.

The loss of the half-serious in music has led to a popular music devoid of taste, in which beat is the unifying force, and harmony and melody have atrophied. The dependence on beat has produced a new kind of audience; an audience that moves to music in a way that was traditionally forbidden by the culture of listening. Lacking all but the most rudimentary experience of melody and harmony, this audience has been effectively cut off from the classical tradition. Young people are frankly puzzled by the sight of adults listening in a concert hall to complex sounds that have no percussive "back-up," and which move through elaborate excursions that are seldom if ever repeated. From their perspective, this whole practice makes sense only on the assumption that something erudite and scholarly is taking place, and that the sounds of the orchestra are not enjoyed but *studied*. The pop fan joins with the modernist in accepting the absolute dichotomy between highbrow and lowbrow music.

Pop music, however, has no survival value—less even than the music-hall songs that are disinterred from time to time, and heard with such helpless nostalgia. Although it wears away the ears of those who live with it, pop cannot provide the basis for a true musical culture. It has no capacity for allusion, development, or cross-reference; no ability to free itself from the mechanical devices that are the principal source of its musical appeal. It will always be a sterile and life-negating force, from which nothing proceeds apart from a habit of distraction. Eventually, like television, it will either lose its adherents, or reduce them to a zombie-like condition that will isolate them from the past of mankind. In such conditions,

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a new culture of listening will begin to emerge.

We are already seeing this happen. The avant-garde persists now only as a state-funded priesthood ministering to a dying congregation. We have seen the demotion of serialism from the obligatory language of modern music to a stylistic eccentricity in free competition with the tonal styles; we have witnessed, too, the renunciation of experiment for experiment's sake and the attempt to integrate the modernist discoveries into a *lingua franca* that will be not so much post-tonal as pantonal. Atonal music proved unable either to find an audience or to create one. Its harsh interdictions and censorious theories threatened the musical culture, by disparaging the natural bourgeois life on which it depends. They have ended up on the dustheap of history, to become an environmental hazard only when stirred by curious scholars.

The new audience does not feel the force of modernism's bleak imperatives. It is as yet a fragile audience: its ears muddied by pop music, and barely aware of the distinction between rhythm and beat. Yet it has encountered the old musical culture, and been inspired by it. We should not be surprised if this new audience prefers easy homophony to complex polyphony, endless repetition to continuous development, block chords to voiced harmonies, regular beat to shifting accent, and boundless chant to bounded melody. For such are the expectations fostered by popular culture. Nor should we be surprised if the new audience is animated by a religious longing, while being unable to distinguish the religious from the religiose, content with a sentimental image of a faith that, in its real version, stands too severely in judgment over the postmodern world view.

Indeed, it is only with the emergence of this "discultured" audience that Schönberg's vision of the final degeneracy of tonal music has been realized. Ears schooled in pop seek for beat instead of rhythm, for "backing" rather than voice-led harmony, and tunes that divide into croonable phrases. Such ears are initially deaf to counterpoint, and to the real experience of tonality, as a working out in three dimensions of structural relationships. They hear in Steve Reich or Philip Glass a kind of elevated and mesmerizing version of their favorite chords, and—having no sense of structure apart from repetition—imagine this to be a paradigm of serious music. In fact the music of the minimalists is far more banal and cliché-ridden than any of the half-serious music that has gone out of circulation. Its inability to pass from accompanying figures to polyphonic order expresses its helpless fixation with the chord, as opposed to the voices that fortify the chords as they move through on their melodic journeys.

The new audience also finds in the morose spirituality of Górecki an accessible experience of the "higher" life of music. For his is serious music, with a promise of release from the alienated world of popular culture. At the same time, it is composed as pop is composed, with monodic chanting over unvoiced chords. It is as though serious music must begin again, from the first hesitant steps of tonality, in order to capture the postmodern ear.

This is not to disparage the discultured audience. There is no doubt that, thanks to composers like Górecki and Tavener, the bourgeois ear is again being opened to music. Nevertheless, the thinness of this new music reminds us of the great task that lies before the art of sound: the task of recovering tonality as the imagined space of music, and of restoring the spiritual meaning with which that space was filled. I doubt that this act of restoration can be accomplished in Tavener's or Górecki's way: a musical equivalent of *Four Quartets* is needed—a rediscovery of the tonal language, which will also redeem the time. Many of our contemporaries have aimed at this—Nicholas Maw, John Adams, Robin Holloway, and Alfred Schnittke. But none, I think, has yet succeeded.

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David Denby goes to school

by Roger Kimball

Boil down Horace, the Elgin Marbles, St. Francis and Goethe, and the result will be pretty thin soup.
—T. S. Eliot

The trouble with the educated philistine was not that he read the classics but that he did so prompted by the ulterior motive of self-perfection, remainig quite unaware of the fact that Shakespeare or Plato might have to tell him more important things than how to educate himself.
—Hannah Arendt

Finishing the book, I became gaga for a few days.
—David Denby, *on finishing a book by Nietzsche.*

It is often said that experience is a great teacher. I had been accustomed to believe this myself. Alas, David Denby's account of going back to college has sorely tested my faith in the pedagogical resources of experience—not to mention my faith in the beneficence of "great books" programs. Of course, there is experience and there is—well, whatever we can call that which Mr. Denby has lived through in his many years writing about the movies for *New York* magazine. But think about it: here is an adult, a professional journalist, who in 1991 at the age of forty-eight returned to Columbia College and retook the two famous Western civ courses that he had first passed through as an undergraduate in 1961, Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization—Lit Hum and C.C. for short. Then as now, these required courses offer first- and second-year students at Columbia a swift *tour d'horizon* of Western literary, historical, political, and philosophical works, beginning with the Greeks and the Bible. In 1961, the courses consisted entirely of acknowledged masterpieces; they included no women authors and ended with Goethe and Dostoyevsky. Did that make them pedagogically deficient? In any event, by 1991, the list had been corrected to include Jane Austen and politically corrected to include Virginia Woolf, Mary Wollstonecraft, and—in the spring semester of C.C.—a smorgasbord of fashionable writers chosen for their politics, their sex, their ethnic background, or some combination of the three. Hence the presence on the list of Marxists (e.g., Antonio Gramsci, Jürgen Habermas), feminist radicals (Simone de Beauvoir, Catharine MacKinnon), and a variety of racially motivated radicals (Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X) and philosophical charlatans (Michel Foucault). The result of Mr. Denby's renewed immersion in these heady intellectual waters is *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*.[1]

1 *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*, by David Denby; Simon & Schuster, 492 pages, $30.

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Do not be seduced by the cutesy, comic-book title: *Great Books* is much worse than you think. It is perhaps, just possibly—I hesitate because the field is so crowded—but, yes, I believe it *is* the silliest and most superficial book about higher education that I have ever encountered. It is certainly the most preening and self-infatuated. Dentists everywhere should warn patients who grind their teeth to avoid the book. No one with high blood pressure ought to chance it. Mr. Denby intended his book to be a defense of "the Great Books"—sort of, up to a point, and with much waffling, hand-wringing, and protestations of political sensitivity. But with friends like these, the Western tradition needs no enemies.

I hasten to acknowledge that not everyone agrees with me about Mr. Denby's offering. In a prominent notice in *The New York Times Book Review*, Joyce Carol Oates oozed all over the book, declaring that Mr. Denby was "above all things an inspired reader." In *The New York Review of Books*, the literary critic—or, in Mr. Denby's phrase, "the great English literary critic"—Sir Frank Kermode seconded this sentiment: "he is superb when the material is superb," "his enthusiasm for most of the syllabus is pretty impressive," etc. But then I remembered reading that Sir Frank, preparing recently to change flats in London, had called movers to transport a particularly valuable part of his library at the same time that he called a disposal service to remove some accumulated trash. When two chaps showed up at his door, he pointed to the precious pile of first editions, rare manuscripts, and inscribed copies of books by friends and colleagues. An hour later, he realized that some twenty-five hundred items had been delivered not to his new address but to the jaws of the trash compactor. A horrible story; anyone who cares about books will experience a cold shiver at the thought of something like that happening. But after reading Sir Frank's review of *Great Books*, I had to conclude that he is sadly having some difficulty recognizing a garbage man when he sees one. And as for Joyce Carol Oates: well . . .

Not that the response to *Great Books* has been uniformly favorable. Far from it. Donald Lyons delivered a surgical strike against some of its more egregious failings in *The Wall Street Journal*. A few weeks later, in *The New Republic*, Helen Vendler returned with a squadron of critical B-52s and all but obliterated the book.

I have had plenty of disagreements with Professor Vendler, including some quibbles about her review of *Great Books*. But she has done us all a great service by exploding the central pretensions of this preposterous book. She may overstate her suspicion of what she calls the "highly content-oriented principle" that drives the Columbia courses; but she is certainly right that "seeing the Columbia course use Dante and Conrad as moral examples is rather like seeing someone using a piece of embroidery for a dish-rag with no acknowledgement of the difference between handwoven silk and a kitchen towel."

Mr. Denby has written an extremely foolish book. But it is nonetheless an important book—not for what it says, but for what it symptomizes: namely, the smug, narcissistic ethos of the well-fed 1960s academic radical thirty years on. We learn, for example, that in 1969 when he was in graduate school at Stanford and a member of Students for a Democratic Society Mr. Denby once threw a tomato at Ronald Reagan. There is a lot to criticize about most "great books" programs; often, it seems, they do more to insulate students from any genuine encounter with the Western tradition than to initiate them into its complexities; indeed, precisely by counterfeiting engagement with intellectual and aesthetic issues they may do more harm than good, leaving students (and teachers) with the unfounded impression that they had been feasting on the riches of the tradition when in fact they had been making do with the "thin soup" that Eliot complained about in the epigraph above. Nevertheless, most people who care about preserving

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those riches will, *faute de mieux*, support the idea of great books courses. Which is why Mr. Denby's book is so pernicious: he takes an imperfect but worthy enterprise and turns it into a travesty. It may be, as Chesterton said, that anything worth doing is worth doing badly. But it is possible to do something so badly that one winds up doing something else entirely.

It is also possible to *pretend* to do one thing while one is in fact doing the exact opposite. And this brings us close to the central problem with *Great Books*. Mr. Denby tells readers they will learn about his "adventures" with Homer et al. In fact, what we mostly learn about are the encounters such authors have with Mr. Denby. In his hands, great books furnish a pretext for talking about the one subject that clearly exercises an endless fascination on him: himself. We learn a very great deal about Mr. Denby and his family. His elder son, Matt, for example has a "thick green carpet in his room, a tufted and matted shag that my wife and I inherited from the previous owners of our West End Avenue apartment in New York." We also learn about his difficult relationship with his mother. A chapter ostensibly devoted to Shakespeare opens with a detailed description of her death. (He compares his mother to Lear but assures us that "unlike Regan and Goneril, I did my parent no great harm.") Mr. Denby's chapter on Hobbes begins with the story of how he was once mugged coming out of the subway near Grand Central. Later, in a section on Hegel's famous "Master/Slave" dialectic, he suggests that the two black teenagers had mugged him because "*They did not know that other ways to prestige were open to them* [Denby's italics]."

In his self-absorption, as in some other respects, Mr. Denby strikingly resembles the adolescents he sat next to in class. Although he is only auditing the course, he decides to take the final examination. The experience leaves him prostrate with anxiety:

> When the three hours were over, I cabbed down from Columbia to Barocco, our favorite Italian restaurant in Tribeca, in lower Manhattan, where I met my wife and a friend, and I quickly had a double scotch and most of a bottle of white wine. Later, at home, still quaking, I swallowed a beta blocker, a Xanax, and two fingers of Nyquil.

Gee. One can imagine college students acting like this (though most would not be able to afford Barocco), but they of course have the excuse of being eighteen or nineteen, whereas Mr. Denby is an adolescent only, so to speak, spiritually. In the introduction to his book, Mr. Denby explains that he decided to sit through the Columbia courses again because he was suffering "a 'midlife crisis' or a crisis of identity, or whatever it was." Whatever is was, it sounds serious. Indeed, Mr. Denby's description makes his situation seem like nothing so much as the unfortunate Camembert-like timepiece in Dali's *The Persistence of Memory*:

> I needed to start work on this book in part because I no longer knew what I knew. . . . I sensed my identity had softened and merged into the atmosphere of representation, and I couldn't quite see where it ended and I began. My own memories were lapsing out into the fog of media life, the unlived life as spectator. . . . Reading seriously, I thought, might be one way of ending my absorption in media life, a way of finding the edges again.

This is not the only place in which Mr. Denby makes it seem that what he really needs is not a reading list but a psychiatrist.

Of course, Mr. Denby's self-diagnosis might be hyperbolic (much of the book is): not so much over-dramatized as over-melodramatized. Which is one of the things that makes *Great Books* ring so false. Mr. Denby mimics and recapitulates a certain rhetoric of authenticity; but he manages to make it seem fatuous, bogus, or both. "You're here for very selfish reasons," he quotes one of the teachers on the first day of class. "You're here to build a self." Maybe that's the sort of thing eighteen-year-olds need to hear to be interested in Homer these days. But couldn't

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it, alternatively, be said that those students were in class in order to read important books and learn what they had to say?

It says a lot that at many colleges the answer is, no, learning is not enough. As anyone who has been following developments in education knows, this is nothing new. But Mr. Denby's book forcefully reminds us to what extent the transmission of knowledge has taken a distant back seat to various social, political, and psychological goals. One of the most disturbing things in *Great Books* is its unwitting portrayal of the extent to which an element of apology has insinuated itself into the teaching of basic courses in Western civilization today. At Columbia—and no doubt elsewhere—the opening classes seemed devoted entirely to explaining to the students why it is O.K. to read some great works of literature and philosophy in college. They really aren't only about WASPs, the teacher pleads; there's more to it than Dead White European Males, he cajoles. It is simply business as usual when a black student complains about having to listen to Mozart in a course called Music Humanities: "Why is Mozart better than some African drummer?" Mr. Denby objects to this obtuseness, but in fact his book is a perfect reflection of the sensibility that produced it.

Mr. Denby frequently reminds his readers that, although he is a movie critic, he is deeply critical of our media culture. One of my favorite passages would make a good puzzle for students of logical muddle: "As a movie critic and an American man, I believe in pleasure, even in 'low' pleasures, 'shallow' pleasures, and yet the unrelenting hedonism of the media ethos is obviously killing us." As a strategy for having it both ways, this sort of thing must be admired. It allows Mr. Denby to exude moral concern and sensitivity while blithely proceeding to do what he has always done anyway—the classic liberal two-step. In any event, there is no doubt that the movies do provide Mr. Denby with his cultural touchstone for all matters intellectual or aesthetic. Citing the description of Odysseus emerging from his bath in Book VI of the *Odyssey*, Mr. Denby comments: "MGM in its heyday could have done no more for Gable." The New Testament puts him in mind of Cecil B. De Mille's *The Ten Commandments*. He muses on the differences between the way he feels after reading Nietzsche and his feelings "after a rare great movie, like Scorsese's *Goodfellas* or Eastwood's *Unforgiven* or Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*." Re-reading *The Iliad*, he is "shocked," a word that "few people have been able to use . . . well since Claude Rains . . . in *Casablanca*." And so on.

Mr. Denby's experience of the movies has imposed itself on *Great Books* in other ways, too. He has applied his habits as a weekly reviewer more or less wholesale to his discussion of books and ideas. "I would," he explains, "race from Sophocles to a new action movie and then back to Sophocles, and each was actually a relief from the other." Along the way, he offers little *Cliff's Notes*-like summaries of each book, carefully embroidered with personal anecdotes, and then hands out a certain number of stars. Boccaccio, Montaigne, and Virginia Woolf get three stars, whereas Aeschylus, Virgil, Dante, Kant, and others fail to make the grade. Even the *Odyssey* challenges Mr. Denby's award system. "As I moved into the poem, I saw that . . . the *Odyssey* would cause trouble for me. P.C. issues loomed ominously: The patriarchal order . . . unfurled its standard." Mr. Denby finally decides that the beauty of the poem outweighs its endorsement of patriarchy—a realization that we are meant to applaud him for—but not every author wins his approbation. Discussing—and misrepresenting—what Aristotle had said about women and slaves, he draws himself up and declares: "This time I could not dismiss politically correct objections; nor would I want to. No matter how you look at it . . . Aristotle had made a disastrous mistake." In the world according to Denby, Aristotle exhibited a mode of thought common to Greek and Roman aristocrats and "slave owners in the American South."

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There is something breathtaking about Mr. Denby's journey in the foreign land of literature and ideas. Aeschylus, alas, was wont to write "gibberish" on occasion; the *Aeneid*, "an official poem of hegemony," is marred by "a clear artistic and emotional failure in the second half of the poem" that "Virgil himself may not have understood." Fortunately, Mr. Denby is here to point it out. Dante, like Mr. Denby, was "suffering what we would call a midlife crisis" when he set out to write *The Divine Comedy*. But, unlike Mr. Denby, Dante "had entered into complicity with torture"—witness the *Inferno*. "If God would do that," Mr. Denby exclaims, "he must lack a sense of humor." *Great Books* is full of such profundities. Did you know, Dear Reader, that Mrs. Bennet is the "secret heroine" of *Pride and Prejudice*? That Kant—a "great noble booby"—had his "loony" and "comical" side? *Great Books* is fairly teeming with such insights.

At one point, Mr. Denby acknowledges that "the most familiar complaint against great-books courses was that they were shallow." Well, there is that. Here is Mr. Denby introducing us to Hegel: "Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was an academic, a professor at various universities, including the University of Berlin. . . . He was, without doubt, the all-time greatest German professor, the German professor as mad genius, and in my worst moments, I sat at home consoling myself with memories of the Marx Brothers and the incomparable German stooge, Sig Ruman . . ." Et cetera. I won't subject readers to his objection that Plato's theory of forms doesn't accommodate "the peculiar way" that Willie Mays ran around the baseball diamond. A patient person might remind Mr. Denby of that passage in the *Parmenides* where Plato notes that there are no forms for "hair or mud or dirt or any other trivial and undignified objects," but I doubt that it would make much of an impression.

Indeed, perhaps the most extraordinary thing about *Great Books* is how impervious to any really new experience Mr. Denby shows himself to be. He tells us early and often that he has set out on an intellectual "adventure"; every second page is full of encomia to the thrilling existential drama opening up before him. Sample: "The reading of sacred texts in secular courses was a bumpy ride. I had got thrown around rather harder than I wanted, and I had the bruises to show for it. But at least I felt my body, I knew it was there, and I could no longer say my identity was entirely lost in a media fog." But the truth is, Mr. Denby emerges from his yearlong intellectual safari with every one of his opinions and prejudices intact. He is always uttering portentous half-truths like "a great work of art is likely to be challenging and even subversive of almost anyone's peace." But there is no evidence, despite his double Scotches and Xanax, that any of the ideas he rubbed against in these courses seriously challenged or subverted his intellectual complacency. He calls all his friends and urges them to read Boccaccio and Nietzsche, but that is only because in such authors he believes he has found apostles for the kind of emancipated liberal irony he himself espouses.

Mr. Denby repeatedly tells us that his chief criterion for approbation was "pleasure," not conformity to any preordained political dogma. Like so many other terms, however, "pleasure" can mean radically different things. Aesthetic delectation and intellectual insight offer certain pleasures. But it is not at all clear that this is the sort of thing Mr. Denby has in mind. "Pleasure was the key," he insists, "the only way of approaching the arts that wasn't false. You went from one pleasure to the next, one work to the next, and you made a chain of delight. From Bessie Smith to Billie Holiday to Dinah Washington. From Chuck Berry to Mick Jagger to Neil Young. From Billy Joel to Aerosmith to R.E.M. to Nirvana. Or whatever." Whatever, indeed. In *Great Books*, Mr. Denby has attempted to write a defense of Western culture, but on a basis that presupposes its triviality. Or, as he puts in his discussion of Plato, "the movies got in the way, too."

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Degas in Chicago

by Hilton Kramer

It has taken our art institutions a lot longer to get around to a serious consideration of "late" Degas than it did to lavish attention on the late work of Monet, Cézanne, or Matisse—or even, for that matter, Picasso, in whose late paintings the whole subject of a "late style" collapses into parody, if not indeed farce. There are no doubt good reasons for this delay. Nothing in late Degas commands the sheer physical scale of late Monet or late Matisse, and except among a small circle of the artist's devotees Degas himself has never been deified as the kind of culture hero we have made of Cézanne and Picasso. There is, moreover, nothing in the way of romance or a personal myth to be exploited in the promotion of Degas, early or late. He was neither a model bohemian nor a model bourgeois—on the contrary, in everything but his art he was something of a reactionary—and his dour detachment from all matters having to do with personal sentiment is not the kind of outlook on life that lends itself to popular appeal. In some respects, at least, the fate of late Degas bears a closer resemblance to that of late Pissarro, whose paintings of the 1890s we have also been somewhat tardy in coming to appreciate on anything like the level that their quality warrants.

Beginning in the late 1960s, however—a dozen or so years after the revival of late Monet took the art world by storm on both sides of the Atlantic—the first tentative signs of a rediscovery of late Degas began to make themselves felt. This rediscovery, like the art that inspired it, was on a much smaller scale than the Monet revival, which introduced the contemporary art public to the mural-size water-garden paintings of the artist's old age. In the 1950s, both with artists and the public, Monet's oversize late paintings proved to be an immense sensation—the kind of sensation that causes artists to rethink their own artistic goals and procedures, and moves historians to revise their views of the recent past. Thus the immediate effect of the late-Monet revival was to change the scale of American abstract painting and alter the way the history of the turn-of-the-century European avant-garde would henceforth be written.

The rediscovery of late Degas in the 1960s unfolded at a much more modest pace, however, and it did not exert anything like the kind of influence on contemporary artistic practice that for a time seemed to make the elderly Monet a cohort of Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko, a progenitor of Joan Mitchell, and a patron saint of Color-field abstraction. The exhibition that Eugenia Parry Janis devoted to Degas's monotypes at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum in 1968 was certainly a capital event—I count it, indeed, as marking my own introduction to the dour delights of late Degas—but I don't think it can be said to have sparked any widespread response from contemporary artists. There was Picasso, to be sure, who was clearly familiar with the brothel

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scenes that Ms. Janis included in the Fogg exhibition and—if I remember correctly—who acquired some examples of them for his own collection. Those brothel scenes may well have exerted some influence on the erotic fantasias of the elderly Picasso. Yet on this subject it is doubtful that Picasso needed instruction from any outside source, so it may be more correct to speak of an affinity rather than an influence. But by that time Picasso was no longer in a position to influence the course of contemporary art.

Still, the Degas that some of us discovered in that 1968 exhibition of monotypes was, for all practical purposes, an "unknown" artist—an artist who seemed, at first glance anyway, to have severed all connection with his early discipleship to Ingres and moved beyond his somewhat equivocal relation to the Impressionist group to become something else, an artist who suddenly seemed to have less in common with his nineteenth-century contemporaries than with the younger generation of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

It was in that show of monotypes, for example, that one was given a first glimpse of some of Degas's landscapes of the 1890s—blurry stains of color, with barely discernible details and muted contours, pictures in which the medium (in this case, a combination of monotype and pastel) is given a clear and triumphant priority over the subject. In these landscapes the classicist who lived by the tenets of Ingres has disappeared, absorbed in a pictorial enterprise that at times makes even some of Monet's late works look conventional by comparison. The figurative works—brothel scenes, female bathers, etc.—were no less astonishing, for they, too, seemed to usher in a vision that came to be identified as Expressionist.

Lionello Venturi was, I believe, the first to speak of Degas's "Expressionism," pointing out two of the essential elements that defined it: a growing commitment to the "simplification of forms" and a new "dramatic content," the latter derived from the direct observation of forms of life theretofore not considered proper subjects for high art. Both of these elements were given their most original form in Degas's pastels—works depicting (for the most part) female figures in homely, unexpected, and often unlovely postures. Degas indeed raised the pastel medium to the level of major art, an art that allowed him to carry his inspired draftsmanship into a realm of color and light in which the old classical contours were dissolved into forms at once more immediate and more "abstract" than anything he had achieved in his painting up until this time, and it promptly followed that his painting, in turn, would become more and more influenced by his work in pastels.

Well, we all know a lot more about this development now than we did thirty years ago, and in the marvelous exhibition that Richard Kendall has organized at the Art Institute of Chicago this fall under the title of "Degas: Beyond Impressionism,"[1] late Degas has at last been accorded its definitive statement. This is the first major exhibition to concentrate on the last three decades of Degas's long career. It brings together nearly a hundred works—paintings, pastels, drawings, and sculpture—some of which are well-known, to be sure, but many of which are not, and the show is accompanied by Mr. Kendall's book-length catalogue, which may be the best single study ever devoted to Degas's art. The exhibition is a joint venture of the Art Institute of Chicago and the National Gallery, London, where the show was seen earlier this year.

In Chicago, this survey of late Degas is given the additional advantage of a small introductory show of the earlier Degas, consisting of some twenty paintings, draw-

1 "Degas: Beyond Impressionism" opened at the Art Institute of Chicago on September 28, 1996, and remains on view through January 5, 1997. The show was first seen at the National Gallery, London (May 22–August 26, 1996). A catalogue of the exhibition, written by Richard Kendall, has been published by the National Gallery, London, in association with the Art Institute of Chicago, and distributed by Yale University Press (324 pages, $50; $29.95 paper).

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ings, prints, and pastels from the Art Institute's own capacious collections. Dubbed "The 'Excellent Painter': 1855–1886," its title is drawn from a remark attributed to Renoir: "If Degas had died at fifty, he would have been remembered as an excellent painter, no more; it is after his fiftieth year that his work broadens out and that he really becomes Degas." Degas was fifty-one in 1886 when he participated in the last Impressionist exhibition, and he was never again to collaborate in such controversial public events. While maintaining contact with dealers, patrons, and other artists, as Mr. Kendall reminds us, he nonetheless withdrew from playing an active role on the art scene. He died at the age of eighty-three in 1917, ten years after the creation of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, having himself become—in the spirit and style of his art, not merely by virtue of his age—a twentieth-century master.

Many of Degas's most audacious drawings, pastels, paintings, and sculptures of nude female figures in the Expressionist mode date, in fact, from the same early years of the century that witnessed the emergence of Matisse's Fauvism and the artistic course that led to Picasso's *Desmoiselles*, and need to be seen as a parallel development. Degas spent many of his most intense working hours in this period drawing from a few favored models in the isolation of his studio. The models themselves were possessed of no special beauty or distinction. Indeed, they seem to have been chosen precisely because the lineaments of their naked bodies were so commonplace, so far removed from both the canons of classical taste and contemporary standards of feminine allure. For Degas, however, they were neither sexual objects nor subjects of social inquiry. He posed them, moreover, in the kind of unconventional and unbecoming postures that were certain to be seen by the received taste of the time as unattractive, if not provocatively "ugly."

What, then, was the nature of Degas's interest in this curious enterprise? Hard as it may now be for many people to believe in our own era of radical feminism and political correctness, which has spawned a whole generation of art historians for whom the politics of sexuality has supplanted an interest in the dynamics of artistic invention, Degas's mission in this endeavor seems to have been entirely aesthetic. No less than Matisse in his leap into Fauvism or Picasso in his creation of *Les Desmoiselles*, what Degas was in search of in these "ugly" subjects was a whole new repertory of pictorial forms, and that certainly was what they yielded him.

It was, after all, the same kind of mission that had drawn him to lavish so much aesthetic attention on the subject of ballet dancers. So much sentimental twaddle has been devoted to that subject that we seem to have forgotten how little in the way of conventional standards of beauty is to be found in Degas's paintings and drawings of the ballet. Degas's ballet dancers are anything but paragons of physical grace or perfection. They are, for the most part, faceless creatures whose principal interest for us—as it was for Degas—lies in the formal gestures traced by the bulk and movement of their bodies in space. Degas took no more "personal" interest in those bodies than he brought to those of the horses he observed at the race track. He was indifferent to everything about them but what they might contribute to the further development of his own art.

This radical aesthetic attitude may strike us as unduly cold, even "inhuman," but to think so is, I believe, to misunderstand not only Degas but much else in the great art of the past. It is not, in any case, the only way of thinking about an aesthetic intelligence of Degas's persuation. Paul Valéry put the matter quite differently when, in writing about Degas, he observed that "Art, for him, was simply a series of problems in a more subtle kind of mathematics than the real one, a kind that no one has ever been able to expound, and whose existence is known to very few. He was always ready to talk about the *science* of art: he would say a

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picture was the result of a *series of operations.*" This is an observation that could just as easily be applied to Mondrian as to Degas, for it suggests a similar degree of detachment from anything but the artist's essential mission.

Just how radically entrenched in the aesthetic dynamics of that mission Degas became is further illuminated by Mr. Kendall in his account of the artist's working methods in these last years of his career. It turns out that many of the most inspired drawings and pastels of both dancers and nude models in this period were not, in fact, executed from direct observation but were the result of tracings that Degas made of earlier drawings which he then developed into far more elaborate new drawings and pictures. The forms wrested from direct observation of the figure became, in effect, the *donnée* for an entirely new conception, a new formal conception that, with the lavish application of pastel, often owed as much to color—and sometimes more to color—than to the contour or volume in the "original."

"What charcoal is to Degas's line and structure," writes Mr. Kendall, "so pastel is to his color. . . . In pastel, Degas found a medium that propelled him towards extravagance, using the patient tracings of his draftsmanship as a springboard to the 'orgies of color' in his final decades." It was a remarkable achievement for a master artist who began as a disciple of Ingres, and in giving us a definitive account of this "late" achievement the "Degas: Beyond Impressionism" exhibition is likely to be one of those events that compels us once again to revise the history of early twentieth-century modernism.

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La Tour in Washington

by Karen Wilkin

Many years ago, when I was an undergraduate art-history student and attending an exhibition opening was still exotic, I was invited to the inaugural evening of "The Splendid Century: French Art 1600–1715," at the Metropolitan Museum. The event remains sharply etched in my memory, not for what was in the show, but for a terrifying inquisition about iconography administered by a professor of mine and the Louvre's Charles Sterling; this is not wholly irrelevant, but more about that later.

The show was memorable, too, because when I went back and was able to concentrate on the art without feeling that I was on trial, I discovered that it included a dazzling selection of important paintings of the period—Poussins, Le Nains, Claude Lorrains, Philippe de Champaignes, and more. Among these iconic and recherché works, one picture seemed especially compelling to me then and has held me ever since, on visits to the Louvre: a large painting of four women looming out of darkness, moving in slow procession toward a recumbent male nude who sprawls across the bottom of the picture, senseless, head thrown back, an arrow piercing his chest. A blazing torch held by the kneeling woman closest to the youth illuminates the scene; above her, one of her companions weeps, one laments from the depths of a voluminous hood, and one spreads her hands in a gesture of ineffable tenderness. The mourning women fill the canvas, a cascade of sturdy forms reduced to essential masses by the glowing flame, descending toward the pale, beautiful nude. Everything seems preternaturally still, uncanny, as though a moment of great significance had been endlessly, magically prolonged.

The picture, of course, is one of the most haunting in the history of French art, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*, painted about 1650 by Georges de La Tour (1593–1652), a relatively obscure figure who seems to have worked for most of his life in the province of Lorraine, where Joan of Arc came from. It's a picture that stops you dead in your tracks with its power, immediacy, and strangeness, one of those rare images that seems to encapsulate everything most characteristic of the artist who painted it, to sum up the values and obsessions of its period, and at the same time, to make questions of art historical context irrelevant. In many ways, the picture is a textbook illustration of its moment, addressing typical Counter Reformation themes of piety and devotion, explicitly embodied, in accordance with the official directives of the time, in an event from the life of a saint. Stylistically, too, the picture is typical of its time and place. Its dramatic play of dark and light reflects the persistent influence of Caravaggio's innovations in the early part of the seventeenth century; even the unforgettable, plunging composition sounds an echo of Caravaggio's famous interpretation of the Deposition from the Cross, now in the Vatican

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Museum, with its bereaved attendant figures collapsing toward the sagging body of Christ. As well, the eloquent simplifications of La Tour's picture attest to the growing importance, particularly in France, of a high-minded, cool classicism wholly at odds with Caravaggio's expressive, theatrical realism. But *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene* is also an intensely individual picture. La Tour's imagery and approach may have all the earmarks of the dominant concerns of its moment, but the painting is a paradigm of his own inventiveness.

A painting as arresting as *Saint Sebastian* makes you hungry to see more works by its author. Satisfying that appetite, however, is not an easy task. The number of unquestioned, authentic surviving works by La Tour is not large and they are widely dispersed, scattered across Europe, the U.S., Canada, and even Japan. The last major exhibition devoted to the enigmatic painter was a pioneering effort at the Louvre in 1972. This landmark show and its definitive catalogue codified what was then the most up-to-date scholarship and provoked a quarter-century of intensive new research, research that has, in turn, produced interesting revisions and additions to the La Tour canon. This interest also led to important subsequent shows in Europe that examined the Lorraine painter in the context of other artists of his period. But until the beginning of October of this year, there had never been an exhibition dedicated to La Tour in America.

Now, however, "Georges de La Tour and His World,"[1] a joint initiative of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, has filled that void. This scholarly, thoughtful, and thought-provoking exhibition will serve to introduce La Tour to American audiences unfamiliar with his distinctive work, while allowing his admirers to savor the fruit of the past twenty-five years of La Tour studies. The show, the largest group of La Tour's pictures assembled since the 1972 exhibit—about two dozen—is both modest and spectacular. Initially limited to "La Tour in America" (which includes a surprisingly large number of notable works), the selection was gradually expanded to include works by La Tour that have "emerged from obscurity" since the Louvre retrospective, along with a precious few celebrated pictures from French collections, for purposes of comparison and deeper inquiry into specific iconographic and stylistic questions. Works by La Tour's contemporaries and artists who influenced him were added to provide further opportunities for comparison and clarification. The result is a fascinating case study that offers a concise, comprehensive overview of La Tour's development, and situates him within the context of his peers. It also offers graphic evidence of some of the "La Tour problems": thorny issues not only of authorship, dating, and condition, but in the case of multiple versions of the same theme—common practice for successful painters in the seventeenth century—of sequence. It's an eye-testing exhibition that places acknowledged autograph paintings in proximity to pictures whose authenticity is argued about: according to the wall texts, problematic works were "included in a spirit of inquiry," in the hope of enlightenment and discovery, through the invaluable first-hand confrontations afforded by the show.

The exhibition marshals varied stagings of identical subjects by La Tour's colleagues and contemporaries alongside of his interpretions of the same conceits and, most dramatically, brings together alternative versions, now widely separated, of some of La Tour's most admired and, at the time,

1 "Georges de La Tour and His World" opened at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, on October 6, 1996, and remains on view through January 5, 1997. The show will reopen at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, on February 2, 1997, and remain on view through May 11. A catalogue of the exhibition, written by Philip Conisbee and others, has been published by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and Yale University Press (319 pages, $50; $24.95 paper).

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sought after motifs. A pair of closely related, pensive Magdalenes, each pondering mortality by the flickering light of an oil lamp, have been brought from the National Gallery and the Louvre to hang side by side, their similarities and differences sharply defined by the confrontation. The Magdalenes are surrounded by what the curators call other "Nocturnes"—candlelit pictures referred to in La Tour's day as *nuits*—that explore parallel Counter Reformation themes of mystical contemplation. Some are indisputably by La Tour, while others are plainly not; some, now lost, are represented by contemporary copies and prints that make you think about the fidelity of transcriptions, repetitions, and alternative conceptions. Some raise challenging questions about the effects of time, cleaning, and overpainting on what may or may not be authentic works. The cumulative effect is to make you look hard and then harder—which La Tour amply rewards.

In his day, La Tour's *nuits* were among his most appreciated works—witness the numerous surviving variations of his "Magdalene with a flame" image—and the show provides a good selection of candlelight and torchlight pictures, mostly from the last years of his career. Alas, neither "my" *Saint Sebastian* from the Louvre nor its variant from Berlin—debated as being either an autograph picture or a contemporary copy—is included in this exhibit, which leaves a conspicuous hole. But there are compensations, such as the tender, numinous *Newborn Child* (c. 1645, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes), a picture that can serve as a model of La Tour's formidable ability not only to create harmonious compositions or to explore a remarkable range of subtly varied tonalities and colors, but to turn an intimate, ordinary event, such as a young mother's presentation of her infant to an older woman's admiring gaze, into a moment of apparently deep meaning and lasting resonance. Transparent shadows and ravishing light—in *The Newborn Child*, a shielded candle, the banal source of an ambiguous glow that seems as much to radiate from the sleeping child as to reflect off his pale swaddling clothes—create hermetic, self-contained worlds in which spiritual meaning seems palpable. You don't have to know anything about the freight of religious and moral symbolism seventeenth-century thinkers attached to the contrast of light and darkness (provocatively discussed in a catalogue essay by Philip Conisbee, the exhibition's curator) to suspect that these are not casual domestic scenes. *The Newborn Child* is, of course, a Madonna and Child with St. Anne, presented in the most familiar, everyday terms. The meaning of the picture seems to shift as you watch, expanding from the anecdotal particulars of genre into the elevated aspirations of the devotional. The protective gesture of the exquisitely painted, backlit hand that shields the candle changes from a practical precaution against a draft that might blow out the flame into a simultaneous sign of blessing and affirmation of faith, an act of sheltering not a literal flame, but a symbol.

What turns these superficially unremarkable scenes into evocations of the exhalted? La Tour's orchestration of light is obviously paramount, but his deployment of the masses modeled by that light is no less important: his preference for large-scale forms that press against the surface of the canvas and into its corners, squeezing the surrounding space into insignificance. La Tour's characteristic ways of putting a picture together, his ways of visualizing formal dramas, create images of considerable urgency and visual weight. This is true even when their message remains impenetrable to twentieth-century eyes, as it does in his triumph of archectonic design, *The Flea Catcher* (c. 1630–34, Musée Historique Lorrain, Nancy). No one has yet "decoded" this foursquare candlelit picture of a robust but not particularly voluptuous young woman, stripped to her shift, like one of Rembrandt's earth mothers, to go about her unappetizing task. It's almost certainly not a simple genre scene, given the conventions of the period and given, especially, La

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Tour's habitual use of light and dark to embody oppositions of good and evil, truth and ignorance, redemption and loss. But if the original meaning remains opaque, the real drama and mystery of the picture come from the play of luminous shadows and radiant highlights, the woman's rapt absorption, the way her generous figure responds to the dimensions and proportions of the canvas, and the contrast of the arabesques of the candlestick and the turned furniture legs with the flat red planes of the chair's back and seat.

The candlelight pictures are among the most striking in the show and in some ways, among the most remarkable, since they include a recently discovered and identified late work, *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness* (c. 1645–50, Conseil Général de la Moselle) and a "Magdalene variation" never before exhibited, *The Repentant Magdalene with a Document* (c. 1630–35 or 1645–1650, private collection). The latter is a very odd picture indeed. Neither the catalogue text nor the wall panels suggest that there are any doubts about it, although the catalogue entry is unrevealing about the picture's history, stating its provenance only as "private collection, France." Yet to my eye, at least, this half-length, seated nude seems markedly different from the other candlelit Magdalenes. Unlike her introspective, contemplative sisters, she gazes rapturously at the skull on the table before her, her unshakable focus apparent despite the swoop of hair that hides her face. There's a peculiar evenhandedness of color and tonality, far more so than in the near-monochromatic, though nuanced *John the Baptist*, but what is most disturbing, this Magdalene is definitely an ex-soubrette, her oddly pert nose like something out of a 1930s fashion plate. Of course, as the wall and the catalogue texts keep reminding you, deterioration and restoration can wreak havoc.

La Tour's *nuits* are among the most overtly Caravaggesque of his pictures (albeit among his most idiosyncratic) but as was true of many provincial and, often, not so provincial painters in the first half of the seventeenth century, his debt to Caravaggio is evident from first to last. If La Tour's *nuits* owe a good deal to Caravaggio's dramatically lit religious paintings, his so-called "daylight pictures" are equally informed by his Italian predecessor's genre scenes. La Tour's pictures are populated by figures who nag at your memory, sending you back to your books on Caravaggio and the Caravaggeschi to verify just where you saw that person, that gesture, that pose before.

La Tour, like so many of his contemporaries, fills his canvases with bald old men, peasant saints, canny fortunetellers, and seductive young men with plumed hats, bathing them in form-modeling light. Following Caravaggio's lead, La Tour translates religious and moralizing subjects into everyday terms; like Caravaggio, too, La Tour takes evident pleasure in closely observed, homely details of costume, setting, and appearance. Unlike Caravaggio, however, La Tour avoids the downstage, front and center gore that was a signature of the bad boy of the Italian Baroque; his penitent saints may clutch blood-stained scourges, but no wounds are visible. La Tour's relationship to Caravaggio is one of the central questions addressed by the exhibition catalogue, which makes a persuasive case for indirect rather than direct influence—a reasonable assumption, since there is no documented evidence that La Tour ever went to Italy, unlike the majority of his peers, who absorbed their Caravaggism firsthand. An essay by Leonard J. Slatkes compares La Tour and "the Netherlandish Followers of Caravaggio," stressing the similarities between La Tour's compositions and images by Northerners who had been to Rome, many well known at the time through engravings.

That La Tour was aware of the most innovative, notorious art of his time, whether firsthand or through a variety of intermediaries, is a given. What the exhibition makes clear is that he was also an irreducible individual, a notion dramatically illustrated by what is probably the crescendo

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of the Washington installation, a stellar assembly that explores one of the most popular moralizing genre themes of the period: the foolish innocent, victimized by charlatans, cardsharps, and thieves. Four of La Tour's versions of the motif, both daylight and nocturnal, are brought together with a near-definitive gathering of works by Netherlandish and French Caravaggeschi, plus one Italian contemporary and close follower of Caravaggio, and, as if this exemplary selection were not enough, an important "source": the Kimbell Art Museum's Caravaggio, *The Cardsharps* (c. 1594), an early picture with an impeccable provenance.

The whole is impressive and instructive, but its cumulative significance is almost eclipsed by the quirky potency of the three daylight La Tours, hung side by side: *The Fortune Teller* (c. 1630–34, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), *The Cheat with the Ace of Clubs* (c. 1630–34, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth), and *The Cheat with the Ace of Diamonds* (c. 1630–34, Musée du Louvre, Paris). Like the works that surround them, they are pictures of half-length figures who fill the canvas: exotically clad "gypsies" and plausible, beautiful women who conspire, with the help of accomplices, to fleece rather fatuous, rich young men. But despite the family resemblances, the La Tours appear to be exploring new territory. His pictures seem based on an inherent abstractness of form, a disciplined Neo-Platonic idealism that seems at once characteristically French, extremely personal, and very unlike the earthy, tactile realism of Caravaggio and his followers.

Seeing the three La Tours together is alone worth the trip to Washington, not only for their superb color; not only for their sensuous evocation of textures from velvet to plumes to skin; not only for their wonderful paint handling, from broad, layered passages to delicate brush drawing; not only for their ironic invitation of the viewer's complicity by revealing to him what is hidden from some of the participants; but because seeing the three paintings together is like watching La Tour think. The Louvre and Kimbell pictures are almost identical—scholars posit that they were based on the same cartoon—but they are also subtly different, which becomes evident because of the exhibition's marvelous hanging. The figures in the Kimbell's picture are not only more brilliantly dressed—La Tour rings changes on a glorious range of reds, from rose to salmon to brick—but they are more evenly distributed across the canvas, linked by a rhythmic chain of bent arms and interlocking gestures that fuses the gorgeously clad victim with his tormenters. In the Louvre's more somber, equally rich painting, the group of conspirators—the elegant woman with her sidelong glance, her male companion, a serving girl—is slightly compressed, which unites the evil-doers in a tight pyramid centered on a knot of hands holding a wine glass and cards, while isolating their plump, self-satisfied prey. This small shift darkens the mood of the picture, making the ploy seem more sinister, an effect heightened by the darker palette and the repeated downward thrust of the dangling black ribbons on the Louvre cardsharp's sleeve, neatly knotted in the Kimbell's version.

La Tour emerges from the Washington show as such a strong and individual painter that it is difficult to believe that he was forgotten from soon after his death until the beginning of the twentieth century. His paintings were not identified until 1915, when signatures on two important *nuits* were at last deciphered and connected with a then entirely obscure artist whose existence was attested to only by local archives, themselves unexplored and unpublished until 1863. By the 1930s, more pictures had been identified, discussed, and exhibited, most importantly in 1934, in Paris. A pioneering monograph published in 1948 was not superseded until the advent of the 1972 exhibition and its authoritative catalogue. And, as the Washington exhibition makes dramatically clear, paintings by La Tour are still being identified; notions of

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the trajectory of his development are still being refined. Many of the early La Tours in the show, for example, of beggars, half-length apostles, and blind musicians, have only recently been assigned to the Lorraine painter. Chiefly works that have been known for a long time, they were originally attributed to other artists, most often seventeenth-century Spanish masters, because of their vernacular subject matter, their broad modeling with masses of dark and light, and their subdued palette. It's easy to see why the mistaken attributions would be made, if you think of early Velázquez—those bold images of a boy with a water jug or an old woman cooking eggs, firmly modeled by shafts of warm, form-revealing light.

Among the most startling of La Tour's early pictures in Washington are a series of blind hurdy-gurdy players, like prefigurations of Manet's full-length costumed musicians and toreros in their economy and tonal clarity; the similarity arises, of course, not because La Tour was known to his modernist compatriot, but because Manet looked long and profitably at La Tour's Spanish contemporaries, who, like the painter from Lorraine, were deeply responsive to what they knew of Caravaggism. Despite their unembellished forthrightness, La Tour's blind musicians are probably not simple genre pictures. They fit neatly into a Baroque tradition of images that allude to the senses, but they do so through a remarkable conceit, evoking sight and sound through their absence; the viewer sees an image of someone who cannot see but has been scrutinized, captured in the act of making sounds that the viewer cannot hear.

Like last season's fascinating "Rembrandt, Not Rembrandt" at the Metropolitan, "Georges de La Tour and His World" demonstrates vividly how new scholarship can change perceptions of an artist, not, however, as in Rembrandt's case, by questioning works thought to be by the master, but by gradually retrieving a neglected *oeuvre*. Modern technical examination (well documented in the catalogue) is helping to clarify La Tour's methods and, in turn, raising new questions about sequence and authenticity that must be addressed by connoisseurship—is a given picture a lesser authentic work, a fine original in bad condition, a contemporary copy, or by someone else entirely? It is known, for example, that La Tour's son Etienne was a painter who worked as an assistant in his father's studio, even though no works jointly signed or signed by Etienne de La Tour survive. It has been suggested that some of the problematic works attributed to Georges might be copies or wholly original works by Etienne, yet Conisbee cautions that while it is tempting to assign lesser works to the son, incontrovertible proof is still missing—as it is for almost all the details of La Tour's career. Modern archival research has unearthed an enormous amount about the period and the circumstances surrounding La Tour's life as an artist—it forms the basis of Conisbee's essay—but despite the exhaustive detailing of events, of people La Tour might have come in contact with, or things he might have seen, had he gone somewhere he might have gone, it's almost all tantalizingly circumstantial. As Conisbee states, virtually nothing is known about La Tour's early life, his training as a painter, his travels, or any other crucial aspects of his formation as an artist. He could be described, as Churchill did Russia, as "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," but as this show makes clear, his pictures speak no less eloquently for the many unanswered questions surrounding them.

As to unanswered questions: what was relevant about my being grilled by the distinguished art historian Charles Sterling at that opening at the Metropolitan? Sterling was a pioneer La Tour scholar, co-curator of the pivotal 1934 exhibition in Paris that reintroduced the forgotten master to a larger public. Sterling would have enjoyed the Washington show. Without his invaluable early work on its elusive, brilliant subject, it might never have taken place.

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Poems *by Wyatt Prunty, David Mason & Dick Allen*

Etude on a music stand

Abstractly skeletal and waiting,
Dull nickel-shine unfolding up
Where the dutiful music spreads, curls,
This is the sad equivalence
Of upright for the printed sheet
And three prongs down for all the rest,
Such managing for so much same,
As though one score kept keeping score,
There where the chorus hollows halls,
And shallows on one self-sustaining chord,
As window-broken light, or shadowed turns,
As front rows empty darkly back,
And prodigy and glee and impresario
Imperceptibly the bow unfolds.

—Wyatt Prunty

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Night squall

That dream again: a boy manning the bridge,
The surging, force eight sea, the rolling ridge
Raising his bow to clouds without a mark,
Slamming him down to salt spray in the dark.

One lonely cabin light would keep him warm.
Imagining a refuge from the storm,
Land out there like a hand upon the waters,
Perhaps a family with sons and daughters

Leaning in lamplight to their evening meal.
He lends their image secret powers to heal,
Granting himself this gift, as if the earth
Could give a damn for his romantic dearth.

He knows no better than a bobbing gull
The forces tossing him, how well the hull
Will hold, how long the engine will secure
His progress inward to some sheltering shore.

But if he finds confusion in the murk,
With years he learns a navigator's work,
Steering from dread to dimly figured joy,
Arriving, somewhere, like that bearded boy.

—*David Mason*

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Ferns

Almost invisible, but once you look for them
nearly everywhere
like moss in crevices and drifting thoughts,

ferns are what it must mean
to love without yearning. Protectors
of everything small that needs to disappear,

deer mice and tossed trash, bad brushstrokes in a painting,
theirs is the softest name, the softest touch.
They are social workers

as social workers should be—so full of calm
even those who don't trust them
come into their care. Fiddleheads or not,

the rumor that once a year, on Midsummer's Eve,
ferns blossom with tiny blue flowers
and if a pinch of fern seed falls upon your shoes

you will be less apparent—this rumor
is baseless: ferns have tiny spores
that travel in dew and raindrops,

no more magical
than Henri Rousseau, composing *The Peaceable Kingdom*,
or adder's tongues, cinnamon, wall rue.

In the world's secret corners,
men wish to vanish, but ferns are what look on,
trembling, holding all light green places.

—Dick Allen

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Theater

Politics & the "Pinteresque"

by Mark Steyn

Harold Pinter likes to tell a story against himself. A year or two back, he was flying to Miami and, as a ferocious scourge of the United States government, expected trouble at immigration. "But I was ready for them, I was ready for them," he says. He handed over his British passport and the immigration officer examined it intently. "Pinter," he said, slowly, and paused. "Would that be the dramatist Pinter?"

"Yes!" snapped Pinter, aggressively, preparing to launch into a diatribe on how outrageous it was that a country that claimed to be a democracy should attempt to impede his passage.

"Well, welcome to the United States, Mr. Pinter," said the officer, cheerily. "Enjoy your stay."

The most striking thing about the anecdote is how un-"Pinteresque" the exchange is—save, of course, for the pause, and even that, at least as Pinter tells the story, falls somewhat short. Over the years, he must have had many similarly pleasing encounters in America—in cabs, in restaurants, at check-in counters—and yet none of them has caused him to revise his opinion of the Great Satan: the best you could get from him during the Cold War was a surly assertion that there was an equivalence of evil between America and the Soviet Union. It's not that you'd expect a genial immigration officer to cause Pinter to alter his view of U.S. foreign policy, but you're surprised that he doesn't take it into account: if America is an Evil Empire, then surely there is drama to be made in the contrast between its outwardly perky, wholesome, have-a-nice-day appearance and its dark soul.

Instead, in his new play *Ashes to Ashes* (a Royal Court production at the Ambassadors' Theatre in London), we are in familiar territory: a land of murky, nameless horrors, whose language is explicitly brutal in character yet determinedly elusive in meaning. It is a duologue: Lindsay Duncan plays Rebecca, a terrorized woman; Stephen Rea is Devlin, the man who does the terrorizing, both of her, sexually, and of her country, politically. "I can sum up none of my plays," Pinter has said. "I can describe none of them, except to say: That is what happened. That is what they said. That is what they did." His recent work has perfected the abstraction of violence. In traditional forms, when someone says, "I was seized by a nameless dread!" it usually transpires there's a vampire outside the window or the wicked Sir Jasper is riding across the heath. But, in Pinter, the dread stays nameless. For Stephen Rea, this presents certain difficulties. He has played explicit terrorizers, most famously in *The Crying Game*, as the IRA man who throws up on discovering his girlfriend has a penis —a scene subsequently parodied by both Leslie (*Naked Gun*) Nielsen and Jim (*Ace Ventura*) Carrey. But, in Pinter's nebula of non-specifics, his charm has nothing to play against, and you feel you're watching a man

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who doesn't quite believe in his character, or, indeed, isn't too sure whether there's a character at all. The dialogue chugs along like a slow-motion Abbot and Costello cross-talk routine—"Who's on first?" but without the ruthless, propulsive logic: "When?" "Now." "No." "Really?" "Why not?" "Who by?" "By me." "You?" etc.

Pinter suffered from writer's block for much of the Eighties, and he seems to be recovering ten minutes at a time: some plays are short enough to be performed without an intermission; Pinter's comeback piece, *Mountain Language*, can be played *within* an intermission—it lasts about 17 minutes. By contrast, *Ashes to Ashes* is the equivalent of a Robert Wilson: it lasts an hour. I'm glad Pinter's pen is beginning to stretch itself again, but I wonder if there isn't a very basic reason for his difficulties: at heart he knows that people are not like this, and, after forty years, it requires increasing effort to write as if they are.

In the wake of *Ashes to Ashes*, there was a flurry of comment in the British media about the word "Pinteresque": he is the only modern dramatist to have passed adjectivally into general currency. The official line can be summarized by Carole Woddis, former theater editor at the "radical" magazine *City Limits*, and Trevor R. Griffiths, Chair of the Department of Language and Literature at the Polytechnic of North London, in their *Bloomsbury Theatre Guide*: "'Pinteresque' has come to mean the dialogue of evasion." Griffiths, as a Chair of Language, must be aware that that definition is itself an evasion. To most people, "Pinteresque" means a pause followed by a non sequitur. Down at the pub, when they're discussing, say, the popular footballer Gazza and there's a slight lull and then someone says absent-mindedly, "I've always fancied the Greek Islands meself," they knowingly nudge each other and say, "Oh, very Pinteresque." A couple of commentators have suggested recently that, in fact, "Pinteresque" is virtually indistinguishable from "Pooteresque"—an adjective deriving from the hero of *The Diary of a Nobody* and its assemblage of random lower-middle-class suburban banalities. But what's interesting is that, out in the real world, "Pinteresque" has nothing to do with evasion or menace, but is strictly a novelty turn, applied only to those weird disjunctions when normal human communication breaks down. Indeed, even theater folk use it in this sense. I once went to a conference of American producers at which, during the introductions, a lady from the San Diego Civic Light Opera stood up and proudly declared that, being a mile from the airport, they were the only theater with a plane spotter on staff. "When one's approaching, the amber light goes on. On the red, the performers freeze until the spotter gives them the green. Each freeze lasts about eight seconds, and on average there's 29 planes during each show." A fellow producer called out, "You should do Pinter plays. Then no one would notice."

It is when Pinter applies himself to something specific that you begin to find yourself pining for the dialogue of evasion, the fraudulence of memory, and all the rest. Last October, I discussed the London production of Ronald Harwood's *Taking Sides*, directed by Pinter, and starring Daniel Massey as Wilhelm Furtwängler, the great conductor who chose to stay in Berlin during the war with his beloved orchestra. Pinter had cast, as the American major called upon to interrogate Furtwängler under the de-Nazification process, the British actor Michael Pennington, and what emerged knocked the play off balance: While Harwood's text declined to take sides, Pinter's staging did: Pennington's character was a coarse philistine cartoon, whose dramatic purpose seemed to be less to nail Furtwängler than to foreshadow the world's descent into the vulgarity of American cultural pre-eminence. The play has now come to Broadway (at the Brooks Atkinson), with Pinter replaced as director by David Jones, and Ed Harris taking the role of the major. Jones's production restores the balance: Harris is slier, warmer, more hu-

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man: he and his director do not patronize the character. He is still coarse and philistine, a man whose cultural boundaries are defined by Bob Hope and Betty Grable, whose interest in music extends no further than a bandleader he saw in New Jersey called Dix Dixon. But, shorn of Pinter, the play's evenhandedness comes through: yes, he spews obscenities, but you're more aware now that he's the only one who's actually *seen* the concentration camps; similarly, his young American assistant is the only one who had relatives in the camps. As I walked up the aisle after an early preview, one guy said, "That Furtwängler—he sure comes over as an asshole"; another theatergoer said, "I think the play's rather hard on Furtwängler."

There's a lesson in all of this, especially for so-called "political" theater. Iago is the greatest villain in all drama, but productions of *Othello* work better the more charming and beguiling the actor playing him is. If he's transparently evil, where's the drama? Unfortunately, most political theater in New York at the moment takes the same approach as Pinter and Pennington to that American major: they patronize their characters, and thereby their audience. Thus, your average abortion drama promotes the line that a woman has "a right to choose," but a theatergoer does not: a theatergoer can not be expected to absorb fully delineated characters of opposing views and to thread his way through the ambiguities in between. The result, alas, is that most political theater may be good politics but it's almost always bad theater.

In the media, the 89 percent of journalists who voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 maintain indignantly that, professionally, they're impeccably impartial. In the theater, the President's supporters are just as numerous, but, rather than subscribing to any bogus theory of impartiality, they insist that they're a beleaguered minority, whose freedoms are under threat from the likes of the "religious Right" and other such fanatics. It seems to have escaped their notice that, culturally, their views are now the only ones acceptable in polite society—to the extent that, on mainstream TV sitcoms, there are more gay weddings than straight ones. When was the last time, for example, a figure from the religious Right was portrayed sympathetically in a play or movie or TV drama? They've become the stock villains, their "intolerance" as plain as the twirled moustaches of Victorian melodrama. So, in Christopher Durang's *Sex and Longing* (at the Cort), Sigourney Weaver plays an especially overheated nymphomaniac whose sex life attracts the attention of (here we go again) the religious Right and prompts a Congressional inquiry. No attempt is made to get into the mindset of these characters—their preposterousness, their unreasonableness is assumed—and the jokes aren't as good as you get on even the stalest talk-show monologue. Satire, as the old George Kaufman line has it, is what closes Saturday night—and he should know. But current political satire arrives stillborn from the author's word processor. If anything, Theresa Rebeck's *View of the Dome* (at the New York Theater Workshop) is even more feeble. It's the sour tale of a progressive female attorney who goes to Washington full of ideals and comes back full of some slimy corrupt pol's seed—which *précis* probably makes it sound considerably more riveting than it is.

But nothing sums up political satire's present woes better than *Political Animal*, a one-man show (at the Westside Theatre) written by and starring Douglas McGrath, the screenwriter of Woody Allen's *Bullets Over Broadway* and director of *Emma*. McGrath has been struck by a Big Thought—that only empty, shallow, desperate men can run for president nowadays. He has also found a form in which to present his theory: the glowingly plastic video-documentary tributes much in favor at this year's convention.

Fair enough. I happen to disagree with McGrath: scanning the presidential candidates of the last few elections, you could not honestly say that hollowness is the most common characteristic; even President Clin-

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ton is wily, unprincipled, self-serving, rather than merely an empty suit. But, granted that this is your chosen tack, which of the present parties' candidates best exemplifies it? Which effortlessly lifts his opponents' issues and policies to the point where he's barely recognizable as the man he was four years ago? In Bill Clinton's 1996 campaign, the theatricalization of politics is complete: the mainstream media like to compare it to Reagan in 1984, but Reagan ran a showman's campaign rooted in the same core beliefs he'd articulated four years earlier; for Clinton, consistency is the very last consideration.

Needless to say, the hollow slicker McGrath gives us is a right-wing Republican, and with gleeful relish the actor-author sets about mocking conservative positions on gun control and gay rights, unaware perhaps that on the whole glib, poll-led crowd pleasers eschew these subjects, recognizing them as the sort of complicated lose-lose issues that only politicians with genuine core beliefs would stumble into. It's comforting to think that such men are empty suits, though not perhaps for a dramatist: an empty suit is hard to bring to life on stage, especially when he's given such tired revue-sketch lines as the comment McGrath's candidate Alistair Farrell makes on homosexual teachers: "I shudder to think what Jesus would say if He knew we were teaching the students to love each other." Ha-ha. Worse than the lameness of the joke is the witlessness of the insight: the dimly remembered Sunday school invocation that we should love our fellow man, or fellow person, seems to be all that survives of religious impulse in popular art; the other elements of the package—that, say, we should ask God to forgive us our sins—are deemed irrelevant and judgmental in an age when sin is just an alternative lifestyle.

So don't expect the theater to have anything to say about Clinton's America, any more than it had to say about Reagan's. Most plays on the subject content themselves with the *roman à clef* approach of *Primary Colors*: spot the Pat Robertson here, the Bob Packwood there. You'd have thought Theresa Rebeck, at least, would appreciate the deficiencies of this approach. Aside from *View of the Dome*, she's also in town with her new adaption of Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (at Theater Four), the first New York revival since the original production. Written when the author was living under the Nazis, the play presents a bald but theatrical metaphor: one day, a rhino shows up in town and, such is the herd mentality, soon everyone else wants to be a rhino, too. The last version I saw was Peter Hall's semi-operatic adaptation at Chichester Festival Theatre a few years back, and to be honest I missed in the present production not the music but Hall's clear, bold staging: he'd updated it from Fascist Europe to consumerist America and set it in a shopping mall. I know it's a preposterous and demeaning analogy, but, nonetheless, the scene in which the first rhino glides up in a glass elevator was an exhilarating theatrical moment, for which Michael Murray's leaden, earthbound New York production can find no equivalent.

Speaking of consumerism, we come to David Hare, back on Broadway with his new play, *Skylight* (at the Royale). As with revivals of *Hello, Dolly!*, much as it's a pleasure to welcome him back, one hadn't really noticed he'd gone away in the first place—especially as, like Carol Channing, the female characters seem to remain indestructibly unchanged; indeed, they're exactly the same regardless of which play they're in. The "skylight" of Hare's title refers to one of north London's Spartan, carelessly partitioned rented flats, to which Kyra, the latest earnest, do-gooding, left-wing Hare heroine (cf. *Secret Rapture*, *Plenty*, *Racing Demon*, etc.), has repaired after a failed relationship. Presumably, this type represents some sort of idealized woman to Hare: each to his own, I suppose.

As it emerges, Kyra was previously the mistress of Tom, a bloated Thatcherite plutocrat, played by the bulky if not bloated Michael Gambon. Right-wing boy meets

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left-wing girl: Hare is serving up the great issues as a love story. That can work very well, sometimes spectacularly so, as in the case of *Casablanca*. True, "We'll always have Paris" does not translate particularly well to Hare-land: "We'll always have Hackney Constituency Labour Party 1967 Composite Motion Drafting Sub-Committee on Inner City Index-Linked Housing Benefit." And *Casablanca* had the advantage of being made up by a bunch of hacks as they went along. Hare is too clever, too articulate, and consequently has too many things he wants to say—or, rather, he wants his protagonists to say for him.

In London, more than a few tired businessmen recognized, sheepishly, the situation: the thirty-something ex-mistress who retreats to a poky flat and a mangy cat. But Hare has embellished the situation so that the end of the relationship is also, in a way, a political choice: Kyra now does good works as a teacher in the rundown inner city, and has forsworn the good life that came with Tom's hugely profitable chain of restaurants. Much of what they say to each other about capitalism and socialism is deft and pointed, but the cut and thrust isn't real, only the naïve jabbing of a sixth-form debating society: Kyra is figuratively and literally slumming in her good works, which gives the play's "compassion" (a favorite word with the New York critics) an air of upper-class condescension. In a desperate effort to make their dialogue sound impassioned and heartfelt, Hare has liberally sprinkled the lines with swear words, but, curiously, these sound the most unfelt of all. Gambon is big and florid and expansive and whirls around the flat, Miss Williams huddles fetchingly in her baggy clothes, and both these fine individuals under Richard Eyre's direction never once come together as a credible couple. At times, you sense the actors, Gambon especially, trying to accelerate away from the material, only to find Hare's portentous text dragging them back. For one thing, the play has a very basic structural problem: the relationship is over long ago, and the principals are now meeting up again after a three-year separation; but the politics was over long ago, too—the squabbles over Eighties Thatcherism and Sixties socialism seem so dated that the sparring comes over as some ancient ceremonial ritual, like the State Opening of Parliament.

Speaking as a right-wing bastard myself, I've long ago ceased to be surprised at the virulently left-wing feminists I'm attracted to. In my experience, it's a fairly widespread phenomenon: BBC current-affairs producers periodically put the *Daily Telegraph* columnist Auberon Waugh on a panel show up against the lesbian activist Beatrix Campbell or the black Hackney MP Diane Abbott only to find that he just winds up fancying them. Between Tom and Kyra, though, there's no crackle, no spark, no sense of any genuine attraction. *Skylight* gives us some tired politics, two splendid solo turns, but no drama. Maybe boy-meets-girl is the hardest trick of all.

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Art

Portraits & spells: the mad genius of Antonin Artaud

by John Simon

Popular wisdom, which is not invariably wrong, cherishes the notion of the artist as mad genius. In point of fact, there have been relatively few mad geniuses in the arts, one or the other component usually preponderating. In modern times, to be sure, there was Vincent van Gogh, but even such likely contenders as Alfred Jarry (fake madman), Hugo Wolf (belated madman), and Ezra Pound (opportunistic madman) do not fully qualify.

Antonin Artaud, on the other hand, has always appeared genuinely mad, but his work as actor, director, playwright, theater polemicist, critical essayist, and poet seemed either too sparse or too erratic and eccentric for genius. But now that MOMA has mounted an exhibition of his drawings, Artaud may just make it as a full-fledged member of the sad, select club of mad geniuses.

It feels somehow appropriate that there should be an error in the huge blowup at the entrance to "Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper."[1] Signed by Margit Rowell, Chief Curator, Department of Drawings, who assembled the show, it states that Artaud "died of cancer at Ivry in March 1948, at the age of fifty-two." The chronology in the exhibition catalogue repeats the error: "4 MARCH: Dies at the age of fifty-two at Ivry." Yet the same chronology clearly states that Artaud was born on September 4, 1896. This means that he died aged fifty-one, exactly six months short of his fifty-second birthday.

Not an important mistake, but one that adds a year's worth of suffering to a life of torment. Or, alternatively, makes the final efflorescence of Artaud's art seem less tragically brief than it actually was. Artaud died at the same age as Manet, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Verlaine; if his output was less impressive than theirs, his premature death was nevertheless a major loss to the realms of two, perhaps even three, arts.

Mostly, I suspect, to graphic art, as this gathering of some seventy drawings by Artaud—his first exhibition in this country—demonstrates. But to start with the life. Artaud was born in Marseilles to a strictly Catholic shipping clerk and his wife of Levantine Greek descent. His dark good looks were rather Hellenic—or Hellenistic—and during several early stays with his grandmother in Smyrna, he learned both Greek and Italian. No doubt this was his first serious exposure to myth, which was to haunt him ever after.

The chief determinant in Artaud's life was illness. At age five, a severe attack of meningitis left him with nasty aftereffects: headaches, nervous disorders, and a stammer. By

1 "Antonin Artaud: Works on Paper" opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on October 3, 1996, and remains on view through January 7, 1997. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Margit Rowell, has been published by the Museum of Modern Art (168 pages, $32.50).

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1914, he was also suffering from depression, and spent time in the first of his many hospitals and sanatoriums. Discharged from the army in the middle of World War I, he underwent rest cures at a couple of further institutions, and was diagnosed with hereditary syphilis. At yet another sanatorium in Switzerland, he was given laudanum (1918–19), which turned him into a lifelong drug addict. He had already published poetry; now he started drawing and painting.

Artaud's unhinged behavior became more and more pronounced with the years. In 1938 began a series of consecutive internments in various psychiatric clinics, some better, some considerably worse. At Ville-Evrard near Paris, World War II conditions made Artaud incur serious physical and medical neglect; it was not until his transfer to Rodez in 1943 that he started getting full attention under Dr. Ferdière, a poet and friend of the Surrealists, and pioneer in electroshock therapy. In the space of nineteen months, Artaud was to receive fifty-one electroshocks; they broke his spine, but did not put an end to his bouts of delirium. However, Dr. Ferdière encouraged him to read, write, and draw.

At Rodez, Artaud received visits from many literary and other friends, and was allowed some freedom of movement. His art work and literary translations (Poe, Lewis Carroll) continued after he moved to a clinic at Ivry near Paris, where he was free to come and go, even as his famous friends organized benefits and other forms of financial support. Several public and radio performances by Artaud ended disastrously, but his writings and art works began to prosper. His notebooks filled up with countless texts and drawings.

His health deteriorated further, and a broadcast canceled by the French Radio at the last minute added to his depression. He took large doses of heroin, cocaine, and other drugs to combat the pain from what turned out to be rectal cancer, inoperable by the time of diagnosis. Thus Artaud, whose poetry and texts scribbled in the margins of his drawings were obsessed with the anus and defecation, met his horrible but apposite end.

Next in significance for Artaud was his work in the performing arts. In writing, this climaxed in two manifestoes of the Theater of Cruelty, which he invented and advocated, and which has had its repercussions down the decades. Of like importance was his tract *The Theater and Its Double*. His directorial activity ended with a production of *The Cenci*, the play he adapted from Shelley, and which failed spectacularly. As an actor, he worked with such illustrious directors as Lugné-Poe, Dullin, and Pitoëff. On film, he appeared most notably in Abel Gance's *Napoleon* as Marat, and in Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* as the young monk who comforts Joan at the stake. He was briefly associated with the Surrealists until his falling out with André Breton: Jacques Rivière, then editor of the prestigious *Nouvelle Revue Française*, published his correspondence with Artaud, whose poems he refused to print.

Two further journeys loom large in Artaud's life and work. Always in search of esoteric revelations in magic, mysticism, myth, and ritual, Artaud traveled to the New World in 1936. He took part in a voodoo ceremony in Havana, and received a silver dagger from a shaman, which appears in several later drawings. In Mexico, he participated in peyote rituals among the Tarahumara Indians, and later wrote a book about it. Next year he went off to Ireland to discover the lost rites of the ancient Celts, and return his wooden cane that, he claimed, had belonged to Saint Patrick. Broke, deprived of drugs, and unable to speak the language, he became progressively more violent, and was jailed and finally deported by the Irish. On board ship, he allegedly attacked a couple of mechanics with his silver dagger and arrived in Le Havre in a straitjacket. Perhaps one should include here the journey of Artaud's face through his relatively short life. Angelically beautiful as a young man, he looked in middle age like a ravaged, sinister sorcerer. This spec-

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tacular transformation is easily traceable through many portrait photographs, several of them included in the exhibition.

There were affairs with women, although sex was always something profoundly troubling for Artaud. He actually got engaged to Cécile Schramme, a young Belgian artist, in 1935. Two years later, after a particularly scandalous lecture he gave in Brussels, the girl's parents broke off the engagement. But throughout his life, Artaud had a quasi-mesmeric effect on numerous young women, and not a few men. Today, he lives mostly through *The Theater and Its Double*, as a strong influence on the likes of Jean-Louis Barrault, Peter Brook, and many others.

The exhibition starts with a few examples of the *sorts* (spells) and *gris-gris* (an African word meaning charm, fetish, amulet) that are in effect letters to friends and enemies (sometimes interchangeable), and consist of messages on stationery that is often mere graph paper. On these Artaud made cryptic little drawings in India ink or wax crayon, as well as deliberate splotches and cigarette burns. If Artaud's insanity needs visual documentation, these macerated, disfigured letters (including one totally mad one to Hitler) will do nicely. The claims for them as an art form, made by both Miss Rowell and Agnès de la Beaumelle, a curator at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, and chief annotator of the show catalogue, strike me as tenuous in the extreme. Let us take Artaud at his word: "My drawings are not drawings, but documents." They were, like everything else Artaud did in words or pictures, a form of exorcism. As his close friend Marthe Robert put it in one of the only two valuable essays in the catalogue (the other is by Ronald Hayman): "Artaud's work is not an *oeuvre* but the desperate search for an exit; it revolves entirely around a cry of suffering; it is the cry itself, neither beautiful nor harmonious, nor pathetic, but simply true."

We come next to the Rodez drawings. They can best be prefaced with this passage from Artaud as quoted by Mme. de la Beaumelle:

> One does not reenter one's body, the body reenters you after it has entered into itself: the unfathomable sexual heart./This heart mounted between 2 cheekstraps, but it had to be shit in order to make it shit because by force of being a heart it only wanted desire and not the suffering of pain/Take off the cheek-straps, take up the harness, abandon the harness, take control of oneself outside of the harness, make oneself into a harness stand and one's being into slaughter, and in that slaughter of the heart, force it to take fire.

Pretty crazy stuff, that, but a good verbal equivalent to most of these drawings, which scramble totemic hieroglyphs with children's artifacts and the doodles of the insane. One can trace parallels with African art, Klee, Miró, Max Ernst, and others as one looks at these graphite and wax crayon outpourings, some of them crowding the paper to overflowing, others concentrating on a part of the large sheet, using bolder lines, and leaving extensive areas blank.

I find the ones crawling with figures and shapes hard to contemplate; the mostly glossolalic texts, either in the margins or scattered throughout the drawings, are equally uninviting. But then there pop up drawings that do exercise the imagination. One such is the 1946 *Le Théâtre de la cruaulté*, displaying four transparent coffins or sarcophagi, each with a mummified figure inside. The coffins crisscross one another in midair, while in the lower right corner a demonic figure performs a handstand on a clump of earth. From the lower left, two branches of a thorn bush extend upward, and where one of them might meet the demon's face, a black penis interposes itself. The figure in the central, highly decorated sarcophagus may well be Artaud; in the others are what I take to be some of his female friends or mistresses.

The craftsmanship here may be less than expert, but Artaud—in the way the principal coffin juts out at us, and the manner in

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which the five colors (red, blue, green, brown, and ocher) are distributed against the background of brownish paper—casts a powerful, creepy spell.

No less arresting is "The Totem" (1945–6), which at a casual glance would seem to be a young girl in a striped skirt running with her left leg raised behind her, her long hair aflutter in the breeze, a red cube-shaped pocketbook dangling from her left arm. On closer inspection, however, the hair may as easily be snakes; the pocketbook is not really that, and is echoed by two equally unidentifiable objects floating in space. A third arm seems to extend behind the head, which features, instead of a face, a jagged polygram with two apparent holes in it, one resembling an eye, the other a mouth. On the right hip there is another seeming pocketbook; a huge nail protrudes from the conjectural waist, and the upraised left leg is really a penis dribbling red droplets. Except for a few touches of blue, the highlights are all in red, thickly coloring the first "pocketbook," and outlining the putative hair and right leg.

Of interest, too, is "The Earth Bodies" (*Les Corps de terre*, mistranslated here as "Earth's Bodies"), which, though extraordinarily spooky, features a touching dedication to a doctor's wife—albeit, like so much else, mistranslated in the catalogue. (Most inept are the renderings of two titles: *La Potence du gouffre*, "The Gallows of the Abyss" as *for* the Abyss, and *La Révolte des anges sortis des limbes*, "The Revolt of the Angels Emerged from Limbo" as *exited* from limbo, which is both clumsy and wrong.) Particularly strong, though, are the last two Rodez drawings. "Self-Portrait" is pockmarked, with pitifully stringy hair, and one thoughtful, one vacuous eye. "The Blue Head" is truly hallucinated, with a monstrously sagging jaw, mouth ripped open in outcry, one vaguely normal and one ghostly eye. Three women's names appear on top; along the side, nonsense words—glossolalia.

Lastly, there is Artaud's real claim to transcendence, the portraits from Ivry, produced during his final eighteen months. Here there is very little self-indulgence (or madness), although some strange texts still appear. Mostly, there are heads, sometimes in stark graphite, sometimes with wax crayon added. These disembodied heads perfunctorily trailing off into a bit of neck, are all fundamentally different, the style adapting itself to the nature of the sitter. A child, Domnine Thévenin, is depicted with perfect ingenuousness; a man—say Marcel Brisiaux, Jacques Prevel, or Roger Blin—looks subtly unrestful; a woman—such as Paule Thévenin or Colette Thomas—comes across serious, thoughtful, lovely. At times, the lines are sparing, fluid, partly rubbed out; at others, they are jabbing assaults on the paper (with pockmarks, nails, and thorns returning), yet resulting in an unearthly, brooding serenity. When there is color, it is usually red, though blue and ocher may also appear, as in a portrait of Monouche Pastier that makes her look like a friendly Medusa, slightly Pre-Raphaelite, but also a bit Edvard Munch.

Many of these drawings are imbued with a great tenderness, as in the portrait of Georges Pastier or Florence Loeb. That of Rolande Prevel could be by Matisse; several strike me as not unlike, and fully worthy of, Kokoschka and Schiele. Only one, of Mania Oïfer (who looks a lot like Cynthia Ozick) is frightening; the ones of Henri Pichette and Lily Dubuffet manage to conjure up a complete complex personality. Sometimes Artaud does not leave well enough alone: on the wonderful head of Colette Allendy, he effaces the mouth, though we can still see that it was drawn very well; on some others he superimposes irrelevant, arbitrary lines. But these are minor annoyances.

Two self-portraits are magisterial. The one of December 1946 has a sad, wise, distant half-smile; the face is surrounded by unruly, (nicely unruly!) hair, and suffused with supramundane sagacity. Very different is the one from 1947. Here the head is exaggeratedly dolichocephalic, like that of some British movie star, with the mane barely sketched in, but looking, to the extent it is

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there, like a sculptural rendition of an elegant lady's coiffure. There is a soupçon of rakish irony in the eyes; the highly finished features in the middle contrasting with the merely adumbrated rest, giving the face a three-dimensional forward thrust. The last self-portrait, however, is ghostly-ghastly, surrounded by multiple heads or parts of heads, including a disembodied ear (a tribute perhaps to his beloved van Gogh, about whom, as *The Man Suicided by Society*, Artaud wrote a short book), and a ghoulish, spidery hand straight out of a Schiele or Kokoschka.

The exhibition ends with a very crazy work, *The Projection of the True Body*, which I leave for you to interpret, and three *Untitled*s, thick groups of heads and figures, some placid, some fiercely totemic. As for the catalogue, it ends ludicrously with Miss Rowell's interview about Artaud with the rock singer Patti Smith. Ah well, we know why, alas.

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Later visions: "Giorgio de Chirico & America"

by Mario Naves

The exhibition "Giorgio de Chirico and America" originated as part of the Curatorial Studies program at Hunter College, and it is impressive and good looking.[1] Professor Emily Braun and graduate students in art and art history have mounted a show that devotees of modern art and, in particular, Surrealism will find of interest. "De Chirico and America" takes as its basis the critical fortunes of Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) as they have played out in the United States. De Chirico's standing as "The Father of Surrealism" rests on his early work, the "Metaphysical" paintings created roughly between 1910 and 1918, and there has been an almost unanimous critical consensus that it does, indeed, constitute his finest period and true achievement. His later paintings, however, are usually dismissed as an embarrassing descent into self-parody. Take into account de Chirico's repudiation of the Metaphysical paintings and subsequent forgeries of them for financial gain, and you have one of the more curious careers—and characters—in twentieth-century art.

1 "Giorgio de Chirico and America" opened at the Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery at Hunter College of the City of New York on September 10, 1996, and closed on October 26. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Emily Braun, has been published by Hunter College in association with the Fodazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico, Rome, and Umberto Allemandi & C., Turin (258 pages, $55).

It is surprising, then, to learn that early de Chirico was practically unknown in the United States until 1935. His initial renown stateside came in 1928 with an exhibition at the Valentine Gallery in New York with work that postdates the Metaphysical paintings. (Alfred Stieglitz had a group of de Chirico paintings as early as 1914 but failed to find an audience for them.) It comes as something of a shock to learn that paintings now commonly regarded as inferior should have been enthusiastically acquired by important collectors such as Albert Barnes, A. E. Gallatin, and Katherine Drier. "De Chirico and America" sets out to document the artist's critical (and literal) journey to America and, in the end, questions the received wisdom about early versus late de Chirico. Braun and her students argue that the late work has been unfairly maligned and is in need of reevaluation. Challenging the received wisdom is healthy, of course, but sometimes the standard line has a basis in fact. "De Chirico and America" thwarts its own intentions by documenting all too convincingly the Surrealist's slide into schlock.

The exhibition begins with a trio of Metaphysical paintings—*Self-Portrait* (1912–13), *The Duo or The Mannequins of the Rose Tower* (1915), and *Metaphysical Composition* (1914)—as an opening act, if you will, for the work to come. While the early paintings are physically outnumbered by the late work, those who value de Chirico's painting

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as painting will find that these three pictures dominate the exhibition. Looking at the examples of de Chirico's later work—with their rubbery muscle men, cluttered compositions, and enervated paint-handling—it is a wonder how anyone can take it seriously, especially with a painting as clinically enigmatic as *Metaphysical Composition* sharing the same gallery. A wall label informs us, however, that "since the 1980s de Chirico's later work, with its ironic strategies of appropriation, stylistic pastiche, and replication have come into favor with the postmodern generation of American artists." Postmodernist celebrations of lousy art are nothing new, although it is sobering to learn that people take them as seriously as they do. (I must hang out with the wrong crowd.) The attempted postmodernist resuscitation of de Chirico's late work tells us more about our own culture's narcissism (and shortcomings) than it does about the paintings themselves.

Professor Braun thinks otherwise, of course, and asks if the late paintings can "be reevaluated as a deliberate transgression against elitist, modernist principles, as an unparalleled subversion of authentic aura?" Braun, who I would hazard to guess has never met a transgressor she didn't like, does fret momentarily over de Chirico's forgeries, but ultimately finds them less cynical than strategic and to be applauded. She even concludes that de Chirico's copies are more "radical" than the artistic legacy of Marcel Duchamp. (Talk about heresy!) For Braun, de Chirico's fakes are not crass attempts at cashing in on one's masterpieces, but "the genuine simulacrum of the similacrum [*sic*] of genuine culture that is kitsch." It is difficult to know whether to respond to such cant with frustration or boredom. Truly, such gobbledygook is beyond the scope of even the most savvy of satirists.

De Chirico's Metaphysical paintings—with their roving architecture, shards of antiquity, and skewed spaces—are staples of art history and have weathered over-familiarity and numerous interpreters remarkably well. Unlike the imagery of, say, Salvador Dali, de Chirico's Surrealist dreamscapes have not become clichés of the unconscious, mainly because they defy easy interpretation. His paintings are less narratives than non-narratives, and the mysterious relationships between his objects give the paintings their tension and intrigue. By "intrigue" I don't mean anything as mundane as the desire to parse their meaning (puzzles rarely make for good art). Rather, that the work's pitiless nostalgia conveys a melancholy that is not uninviting. De Chirico's ruminations on culture and anomie are grave and deeply romantic. The plaster casts, egg, smoke stacks, and flutelike object in *Metaphysical Composition* are certainly pieces of a larger story—if "story" is the right word—but if their whole is not to be found in the painting's narrative, it is supplied by the painting's structure. De Chirico's Metaphysical paintings constitute a tangible, if baffling, world with its own inherent cohesiveness. And that cohesiveness depends on de Chirico's gifts as a painter.

Having said that, it must be admitted that de Chirico was the most perfunctory of painters. We don't go to his mute tableaux for nuanced or bravura brushwork. He may have been "The Father of Surrealism," but he was also content to fill in between the lines, and his line serves as a bare bones indicator of shape. (To describe the contour that defines the artist's profile in *Self-Portrait* as "limp" gives it too much character.) This results in the cartoonish, *faux-naïf* clunkiness of his paintings, a clunkiness that was an affectation. In describing a small 1937 self-portrait, included here, Braun mentions Ingres, and this is no lapse into curatorial hoopla. In comparison to the draftsmanship seen in the paintings, *Self-Portrait* is startling in its sensitivity. De Chirico's maladroitness as a Surrealist painter may have been an attempt to buy into the notion that the untrained artist's vision is "purer" than that of the artist who has been schooled in painting and drawing. This is a myth, of course, and

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I suspect de Chirico was wise to it. But given how badly the more polished Surrealism of René Magritte and Yves Tanguy has fared who can say that de Chirico was wrong?

What truly marks de Chirico as an artist of consequence is the spare, piercing light that envelops his imagery and emanates from his paintings. More so than his vaunted spatial ambiguities, it is this light that distinguishes de Chirico's brand of Surrealism. It has something of an autumnal flavor, so that while a cool bluish-green may serve as a backdrop for *The Duo*, the painting nevertheless has a warm, and warming, tonality. The chromatic subtleties and the (sometimes intense) glow this light elicits sharpens de Chirico's dead-end romanticism. His mood lighting has dramatic and psychological heft, and without it the paintings would merely be weird and sentimental illustrations.

De Chirico's light is desperately missed in the later work. Turning from the three Metaphysical paintings to *Furniture in a Valley* (1927) is to experience a fall in magic that is nothing if not precipitous. With the post-Metaphysical paintings, de Chirico's theatricality becomes a compositional ploy rather than a fantastic scenario given life. Gone is the almost manic sense of space and unifying coloristic tonality. Instead, we are given an insipid fuzziness—the late paintings often feel as if they were overlaid with a sheet of cheesecloth dyed yellow ocher. While de Chirico's imagery becomes more packed in the late work, it also loses its evocative density. With *Metaphysical Composition*, de Chirico created a world; with *The Nobles and the Shopkeepers* (1933), we are given an inventory. The late paintings are not without interest—his fashion sketches for *Vogue* are likable enough—but they lack artistic presence. How can we believe the dream if it lacks any conviction?

By the time we reach *The Mystery of Manhattan* (1973) and *Metaphysical Vision of New York* (1975), de Chirico can no longer be passed off as, in Braun's phrase, kitschman. Such a moniker suggests something campy, perhaps fun, but would that we were so lucky. *The Mystery of Manhattan*, in particular, with its inert brushwork and oh-so-dry surface, is simply a pathetic pastiche—if the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome truly wants to enhance de Chirico's reputation they should lock it up in storage and throw away the key. By placing their bets on postmodernist generosity, the organizers of "De Chirico and America" attempt to pass off the artist's late paintings as major art. But place even the best of de Chirico's "flatulent 'Renaissance' classicism" (to borrow John Ashbery's definitive description) next to *Metaphysical Composition* or, for that matter, MOMA's *The Song of Love* (1914) and it will simply wither. The figure that finally emerges from "De Chirico and America" is a sad one. De Chirico's Metaphysical works will continue to be hallmarks of modernist painting. But this is one exhibition that won't warrant a rewriting of art history.

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The media

The spin election

by James Bowman

I know lots of people don't like sound bites, but if they are carefully chosen, they can be very nourishing. My choice from the first television debate between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, for example, would be the revealing replies of the two candidates when Jim Lehrer asked them for a summing up of "the one thing that you would like for voters to have in their mind" about them. Dole said: "I think the best thing going for Bob Dole is that Bob Dole keeps his word." Clinton, by contrast, began by saying: "I'd like the American people to know that I have worked very hard . . ." It was enough. Here was a perfect summing up of the differences between them. My deadline intervened before the third debate, but I can't imagine a better example of how Dole appeals to honor, Clinton to good intentions. It is the old-fashioned, masculine culture versus the newfangled, "feminized" therapeutic culture.

Clinton's language in the debate was reminiscent of the time when, after less than a month in office, he explained that he could not honor his promise of a middle-class tax cut. "I've worked harder than I ever worked in my life," he began, as if it was churlish of us to expect him to do as he said after he had suffered so much. Elsewhere in the debate he said, "I take full responsibility for what happened in Somalia, but . . ." and then proceeded to try to shift it in a very subtle way by saying "the American people must remember that those soldiers were under an American commander when that happened." At one level this is replying to Dole's criticism of the President for putting American soldiers under United Nations command, but at another level it is saying to the audience that somebody else did it. Likewise, on the question of drugs, he came up with the following formulation:

> Now, do I think that I bear some responsibility for the fact that too many of our children still don't understand drugs are wrong, drugs can kill you, even though I have consistently opposed the legalization of drugs all my public life and worked hard against them? I think we all do, and I hope we can do better.

In other words, in answer to his own question, no. He bears no more responsibility than all of us. And then, later in the debate, he referred back to this passage by saying: "I took responsibility." All of which is to say: here's a man who doesn't keep his word.

It was doubtless accidental, but it looked a bit naughty of PBS to have chosen the two hours just before the first presidential debate for showing the first part of "T.R.: The Story of Theodore Roosevelt" in its series "The American Experience." The implicit contrast between political rhetoric then and now was as striking as that between the old Bull Moose and Mr. Feel-Your-Pain. The contrast was made explicit by Edmund Morris, Roosevelt's (and Reagan's) biographer, on the Op-Ed page of

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that day's *New York Times*. He compared a page of President Clinton's book, *Between Hope and History*, with a passage from Roosevelt's formal letter accepting the Republican nomination in 1904—a document of about the same length.

Of Clinton's 191 words, wrote Morris, "only 31 had any particular meaning. The rest of the space was devoted to clichés (one every three lines), generalities like 'investing in the capacity of our people,' redundancies and extremely vague statistics." In Roosevelt's prose, by contrast, "one senses a passionately self-directed man whose mind moves like an oiled combine over every dry stalk of policy, neatly stacking and sorting." Continuing the same agricultural figure, Morris saw Clinton as someone with "a fatal lack of sequitur" who "drives without steering, and he would as soon process weeds as wheat."

One does not have to be a Clinton-hater to recognize the justness of this comparison. Bob Dole's rhetorical flights in his acceptance speech in San Diego, though largely the gift of his speechwriters, were perhaps a bit more Rooseveltian; but in that evening's debate, apart from the moment of epiphany mentioned above, each man seemed almost as unctuous and pudding-headed as the other. Less the oiled combine than the combinedly oily. It was obvious that things were getting off to a bad start when Jim Lehrer, the moderator, asked Clinton for examples of the philosophical differences between him and Dole and got in reply a list of specific measures he has undertaken that he thinks make him look good—for example, "reinventing government." Dole then replied with a counterlist of the things Clinton has done that he thinks will make him look bad—for example, the health care reform effort. And they were off, repeating their magic formulae (Clinton's "ten and a half million new jobs," Dole's "we can do better") all evening long.

As if to rub our noses in it, Lehrer started off the vice-presidential debate three days later with the same question, about political philosophy. For a moment it looked as if Mr. Albert Gore, the vice president, was actually going to answer it, for he began by outlining the "three principles" on which his (and, of course, Clinton's) political philosophy rests. They are as follows: to provide opportunities to all Americans; to insist on responsibilities *from* all Americans; and to strengthen our communities. Eat your heart out, Aristotle! Then he did as Clinton had done and proceeded to list the specific measures that the administration was taking credit for (including the balanced budget, which had been forced on it by Republicans) because it thought them popular. The whole speech was delivered in an exaggeratedly slow and carefully enunciated fashion which made him sound as if he were addressing a room full of not very bright children.

So, too, when he ironically complimented Kemp for having called, just before he joined the ticket, a Dole tax proposal "unconscionable," he went on to explain the word as meaning "wrong"—and then proceeded to explain "wrong" as "it shouldn't happen"! Like Clinton only more so, he repeated over and over again, and in exactly the same words, the campaign's carefully crafted formulae. Seven times he told us that the Dole-Kemp tax-cut proposal was "a risky, $550-billion tax scheme" (the word "cut" never passed his lips in this context) and five times that it would "blow a hole in the deficit." That's funny. I'd have thought that blowing holes in the deficit was something to be applauded. You blow enough holes in it, as any NRA member will tell you, and eventually it goes away. But Gore wanted his right, tight little deficit, neither blown up nor blown away, and he wasn't shy about telling us so.

In other words, you dummies may have tuned in expecting a debate, but Dr. Gore was going to make sure you got his patent medicine infomercial instead. He, presumably, knows best. The suggestion of contempt for the intelligence of those whom he was addressing I found offensive, but, as

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nobody else in the media seemed to do so, perhaps the contempt was deserved? Or perhaps not. It seems slightly silly to be put out over the dispassionate workings of the rhetorical marketplace, and one supposes that scholars of public opinion like the vice president have a pretty good idea of what will sell on occasions like these. Neither the candidates nor those who tune in are expecting a debate, any more than they are expecting to tell or to be told the truth. What, then, is the point of complaining that the exercises are not real debates and are full of lies and distortions?

But it is a nice question whether our politicians are so bad because our expectations of them are so low or whether our expectations are so low because they are so bad. Moreover, the McLuhanesque "cool" of the televisual medium is notoriously uncongenial to heated debate. As John Hibbing, a professor of political science at the University of Nebraska and co-author (with Elizabeth Theiss-Morse) of *Congress as Public Enemy*, told Richard Morin of *The Washington Post*: "When [people] see political conflict right out in the open, they don't like it. Americans love the rules of the democratic game, but when they see the game in practice they have trouble with that . . . They don't like debate, which they see as 'mud-slinging' even when it is substantive, and they don't like compromise, which they read as selling out on your principles."

This may well be true, and it explains why neither Dole nor Kemp dared to raise the issue of Clinton's character in debate. But that still doesn't explain why journalists and media folk always congratulate them for it. By the time the vice-presidential debate was over and still there had been no engagement by any of the four candidates at the personal level, even a few of the comity troupe were becoming sick of it. Doris Kearns Goodwin on PBS said that it seemed to her that the two candidates were emotionally corsetted; she wanted to shout at them: Go on, get mad; it's OK." Tom Shales in *The Washington Post* wrote that

> it's perhaps to be applauded that the candidates are trying so hard to be nice and gentle with one another, but niceness and gentleness are not the qualities most to be desired in a debate, nor even a joint appearance. . . . Viewers may have found themselves yearning for a pounding of the podium or a raised voice or something, however uncivil, to raise the temperature just a couple of degrees.

His was a minority view. In general, civility is the journalistic *ne plus ultra*. On the day of the first debate, for example, David Broder published in *The Washington Post* the following lament:

> This year's presidential campaign has featured gender gaps and generation gaps. But the biggest and most persistent gap of all—one likely to be on display in tonight's presidential debate—is between the often contrived "issues" the parties and their nominees put forward and the real-world problems awaiting the winner when he sits down in the Oval Office.

He then went on for nearly two thousand words quoting one after the other a series of experts on the important issues facing the country that the candidates are simply ignoring. Two days later, Broder reported on the Op-Ed page of the *Post* on the actual debate. He loved it. It was to him "a lesson in civics and civility," and he thought that, though few minds were changed, "there is now a better chance that the final four weeks of the contest will not degenerate into the kind of character assassination and issue distortion we have seen too much of in the past." He even saw it as a "salve" for "the wounds of defeat" that poor Mr. Dole must now be expecting that the failed candidate will be able to congratulate himself for eschewing partisanship at such a moment.

It is a good illustration of what is wrong with the whole "civility" movement. There is too easy an assumption by the *bien pensants* such as Broder that being "partisan" is the same thing as "character assassination and issue distortion." This is a product of

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our contemporary moral relativism as much as of our natural tendency to flinch at controversy, to be "nice guys" of the sort that Mr. Hibbing sees as the American ideal. It does not occur to Broder that really harsh criticism may also be true, and that true character assassination depends on the falsehood of the allegations. He is simply not interested in the truth or falsehood of what is being said, but only with the appearance of "civility"—which is as much a matter of surfaces as any of the trumped up and oversimplified "debate" issues that he was criticizing two days before.

Only A. M. Rosenthal in *The New York Times*, among major media commentators that I saw, took Dole to task for *not* bringing up Whitewater. But Rosenthal gave no consideration to the powerful incentives to Dole for not doing so. Thus, the day after the debate, when Dole referred to Clinton as a "bozo," it was universally taken as a falling off from the standard of "civility" set the day before. It swiftly became a new example of the famous Dole "meanness." It just goes to show that Dole was unarguably right to explain his debate strategy (and implicitly answer Rosenthal) when he said: "It would seem to me, particularly in the first debate, when there's this myth out there about the mean Bob Dole, if I'd done anything that even appeared to be stepping over the line, that would have been the story."

Even politicians are media critics these days! And the easy relationship between them and their supposedly "adversarial" chroniclers was even more strikingly illustrated in the column adjacent to David Broder's paean to "civility" in *The Washington Post*. Here, Richard Cohen writes of the President's "spin" operation, which went into action immediately after the debate, massaging such journalistic heavyweights as himself. Cohen recognizes that what was being spouted by the myriad of spinning cabinet officers and White House aides (at least one to a journalist) were largely "meaningless phrases," but to him their very presence suggests an important Clintonian superiority. "I have no idea whether spin operations do what they are intended to do," he writes, "but the one mounted by the Clinton campaign Sunday night certainly impressed me."

Is it possible that he doesn't realize that impressing him is precisely what spin operations *are* intended to do? It cannot be. But he makes this ludicrous and revealing slip because it is so natural to him to suppose that it is the journalist's job to analyze process and not substance. Even though Cohen is a columnist and not a news reporter, he still appears to think that he is adopting the approved journalistic attitude by staying firmly agnostic on questions of substance and only writing of the competence of the campaign organization. And of course when journalists in general adopt such an attitude, campaign organizations become simple tautologies, or perfectly closed systems. They do their job merely by doing their job, and they spin successfully merely by being successful spinners.

So Cohen goes on, incredibly, to complain that the Dole people didn't send anybody to try to spin him. Politicians be warned! Journalists, like the public at large, are to be treated with intellectual respect only at your peril! To Cohen, the fact that Republican spin doctors were few and hard to find seems to suggest the incompetency of the campaign and, presumably, the candidate. For the corollary of such analyses as his is that the best candidate is *ipso facto* the best president—a no doubt unexamined assumption but one which is made by enough people to make Clinton, as I write, an apparent shoo-in for reelection. James Bennet in the news pages of *The New York Times* was equally impressed by the "phalanx" of spin doctors marshalled by the Clinton campaign to spin the debate, but was a little more critical of it:

> The Clinton campaign seems to have adopted the Powell Doctrine: using overwhelming force regardless of the odds. At any one time, the campaign had up to four surrogates, like

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> Mayor Dennis Archer of Detroit, addressing local television stations by satellite from the Civic Center; but the Dole campaign had two. . . . In fact, at times there seemed to be more Clinton spinners than spinnees. . . . Members of the press have come to treat spin with amused detachment, as a joke shared with campaign officials that they let the public in on. The joke is that everybody realizes that the officials are exaggerating their candidate's performance—or, to put it francamente, lying.

"Amused detachment" from the lies is, we must remember, a more televisual attitude than old-fashioned outrage.

Not that the media is completely indifferent to substantive issues of truth and falsehood. Substance is dealt with in a little box in a corner, as with the ABC and CBS evening news programs "Fact Check" segment. Similarly, if you turned to page A-7 of *The Washington Post* on the morning after the first debate, you could have found Michael Weisskopf's account of how "Truth Be Told, Both Candidates Sometimes Played Loose with Facts." Likewise, on page A-23 on the morning after the vice-presidential debate, the same author (the *Post*'s resident spoilsport?) soberly noted that "Candidates Do Battle With Half-Truths, Selective Facts and Exaggeration." In both these pieces, Weisskopf outlines a number of both sides' departures from strict veracity as if they cast a curious sidelight on the debate.

Both here and in the TV-news "Fact Check" segments there is hardly any hint of moral taint attaching to the candidates' falsehoods and distortions. The assumption seems to be that no one could have expected them to have been more truthful, or to have attempted to expose the untruthfulness of the other. In short, all partisanship implies lying, or at least exaggerating, and the media like the rest of us is now too knowing and sophisticated and "civil" to expect anything else. But when spin is taken for granted by members of the media, spin is what they will get more and more of. The result will be that any serious and substantive charge of the sort that Rosenthal thinks Dole should have brought up (not only about Whitewater but also about what he regards as the weak and hypocritical Clinton foreign policy) will inevitably be dismissed as mere spin.

Already this is happening. That is why Dole's not bringing it up was a sign of "civility"—and why bringing it up would have been a sign of "meanness." That Dole recognized this and opted for civility is simply a consequence of his recognition of the media culture in which he is forced to operate—a media culture which obviously, perhaps overwhelmingly, favors someone like Clinton, who really is all spin. You may think that the media leads public opinion or you may think that the media follows public opinion or you may think, as I do, that it is a bit of both, but there is no doubt that the media (not counting a few right-wing newspapers, magazines, supermarket tabloids, and the odd British reporter) has refused to make an issue of Clinton's character in spite of the most blatant faults, and so has the public.

This strange state of affairs I believe to be the result of what is more and more coming to be referred to as "postmodern politics." This is the belief of the hip and the sophisticated and the very intelligent that not just the debates but all of politics is theater. We are so used to watching it on television that it is more natural for us to judge it as a TV show than as anything to do with real life. And, of course, the social pretensions of many members of the press corps tend to make them happier as theater critics than as what used to be called "adversarial" reporters. There now seems something rather naïve about dragging real life into a political campaign, and the reporter who did it would feel like the child who is the only one to shout "Look out behind you!" at a Christmas pantomime.

Here, for example, is Michael Lewis on following Clinton around on behalf of *The New Republic*:

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> No matter what you think of Clinton's campaign there is an undeniable joy in watching someone do something he is so good at. Traveling with Dole you are always forgetting where exactly you are; a Dole speech in Ohio is indistinguishable from a Dole speech in California. Traveling with Clinton you are reminded of not just the state but the town and sometimes the part of the town; everywhere he goes Clinton finds some way to evoke a sense of place, almost by the by, even as he delivers pretty much the same stump speech.

So too, *The Washington Post*'s top campaign reporter, Dan Balz, having followed the Clinton campaign from Texas to Massachusetts in one weekend writes admiringly of how

> after his Friday night performance as a common-sense conservative (who nonetheless found good things to say about government), Clinton was by Saturday night an aging baby boomer reliving the liberal causes and crusades on which he cut his teeth 30 years before.

Like Lewis, Balz sees it as nothing more than effective political theater that Clinton played the conservative before an audience in Texas and the hippie radical in liberal Massachusetts, on the same platform as Peter, Paul and Mary and Don Henley and Carly Simon and Crosby, Stills & Nash. Moreover, says Balz, "the entertainers were unrestrained in promoting an array of liberal causes in front of the man who rebuilt his presidency by grabbing hold of the political symbols of the right, and the president appeared to be enjoying it all."

> There was such a surreal quality to the evening's entertainment and to the step back in time that it hardly seemed unusual when Carly Simon came on stage to join Crosby, Stills and Nash for "Teach Your Children," and, after praising [John] Kerry, looked into the front row at Clinton and in a slip of the tongue said, "President Kennedy, as usual, I love you."
>
> From LBJ to JFK in one weekend.

You've got to admit, it makes a good story. But it is a story which suggests how much Americans have changed in the last twenty or thirty years. Now they have different expectations of their president. Now they are hip. Now they see through the performance. Now they don't believe in heroes but want their president to be like themselves—to "understand the feelings of ordinary people," in the formulation of the polling category that Bill Clinton always wins biggest—yet at the same time to take their place in the galaxy of rock stars and celebrities who are allowed to live by different rules. Bob Dole was quite right to say that he stands for the old ways as much as Bill Clinton does for the new. If, as now seems probable, he goes down to defeat, it will be an honorable defeat—and the more honorable as such a thing seems unlikely ever to be seen again in the undiscovered country on the other side of Bill Clinton's "bridge to the twenty-first century."

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Fiction chronicle

Scheherazade's exhaustion

by Brooke Allen

Ezra Pound's exhortation to "make it new" has proved to be one of the most destructive aesthetic formulae ever to come along. Had he had an inkling of what grotesque lengths his successors would resort to in their feverish quest to make it new and ever newer, he might have hesitated, for Pound was no disrespecter of literary traditions.

And while Pound, Eliot, and Joyce certainly set out to revolutionize Western literature, it is doubtful whether they meant to end it. Yet for the better part of a century, the experience of reading the great modernists has had a paralyzing or deleterious effect on younger writers. After *Finnegans Wake*, what next? In a well-known 1967 essay in *The Atlantic*, John Barth coined a term which still has resonance: "The Literature of Exhaustion." Joyce and the other major modernists, he wrote, had given future writers nowhere to go. There seemed no way to make literature more innovative, newer, more "modern." There seemed no way now to astonish, at least not to the extent that the modern masters had astonished.

As a result we have witnessed a century-long effort by the highbrow and the would-be avant-garde toward a state of permanent revolution. In the hands of second- and third-rate talents, the quest for innovation at any cost has produced results that can be seen as depressing or laughable, depending on your mood. Unfortunately, a few genuinely gifted writers (and artists) have fallen victim to the same delusion. Among these, one of the most notable is John Barth himself, who in a thirty-year career has evolved from a mannered but prolifically talented author to a self-indulgent windbag, a stuck record repeating the same notes *ad nauseam*, in book after book after book.

As Barth never allows his readers to forget, his muse, or model, is Scheherazade. He has declared the conceit of the tale-teller telling stories for her very life to be the ruling metaphor for his identity as an artist. "Narrative equals language equals life: To cease to narrate . . . is to die." From a metaphorical point of view this is acceptable—maybe; but as the years go on Barth, always an encyclopedic, repetitive, and lavish writer, has apparently come to take it literally. "About my fiction," he has offered, "my friend John Hawkes once said that it seems spun out of nothingness, simply so that there should not be silence." This is a charge Barth accepts with no small degree of satisfaction, even going so far as to dub the phenomenon "Scheherazade's terror."

This particular wellspring of creative activity would seem to offer more to the author—writing as therapy, perhaps—than to the reader. Writing for the sake of mere writing, writing simply as a means of filling silence or making conversation, would obviously, in the manner of cocktail party chatter, stress style at the expense of substance. And this has indeed proved to be the case. While Barth's early books—*The Float-*

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ing Opera (1956), *The End of the Road* (1958), *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), and *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968)—were (if you can excuse the postmodern excesses of extreme and self-conscious narrative complexity, artificiality, and a kind of dogged and not always very funny "playfulness") interesting pieces of work which displayed almost excessive imaginative powers. However, each book succeeding his novel *Sabbatical: A Romance* (1982)—*Tidewater Tales* (1987), *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor* (1991), *Once Upon a Time* (1994), and *On with the Story*,[1] his latest—has given evidence of an imaginative shriveling, as Barth compulsively plays out minor variations on the themes that obsess him.

"When I was writing *Once Upon a Time*," Barth said in an interview, ". . . I hoped it would be the last go-round, the last riff, the last re-orchestration of some riffs I have been playing for forty years in my fiction, the story of Scheherazade, the sailing quest motif." If only it had been! For *On with the Story* is little more than another riff—more tedious, because more familiar and repetitive—on *Once Upon a Time*'s self-involved musings. It is a novel disguised as stories, in actuality a frame story or story cycle, like Barth's favorites *The Thousand and One Nights* and *The Decameron*. It features a narrator and listener remarkably like Barth and his wife, and, in the individual "stories," many other characters also remarkably like Barth. Since this is a postmodern work, there is a lot of punning and linguistic playfulness. There is also a lot of sailing and travel, each journey involving some sort of spiritual search. And the narrator, in a variation on the Scheherazade pattern, spins out his stories not to prolong his own life but that of his mate—an illustration of Barth's pet theory that "narrative equals language equals life: To cease to narrate . . . is to die."

So: a happy, compatible couple in late middle age checks into a luxurious tropical hotel—their "last resort." It appears that she has been diagnosed with a fatal illness. Between meals, tennis, swimming, and sex (and in this book we are treated to a bit more sensitive, middle-aged, married sex than is really quite appetizing), the husband tells stories to the wife in an attempt to postpone The End, narrative equalling life in the Barthian formula.

Unfortunately, Barth is ultimately more interested in narrative than in life. The form of *On with the Story* is constructed to include the formal structures of narrative itself, and the stories within it are not discrete entities but reflected versions of one another, with characters and motifs jumping their frames from one tale to the next. It is an interesting and sometimes brilliantly executed conceit, and of course Barth is nothing if not intelligent: *On with the Story* provides the pleasures of a complex puzzle or mathematical proof. But all the life of the book is in its gamesmanship; of passion or of *real* narrative force there is little, and when such a thing threatens to enter the rarefied atmosphere Barth has established, he is always there with an authorial nudge to remind us that the story is really only an imaginative construct. After all, as he has said elsewhere, literature

> is an artifice. . . . And so far as wanting our readers to forget that they are reading a novel, we [writers like himself] are more inclined (but then, so was Scheherazade, so was Sophocles and so was Shakespeare) to remind the reader from time to time that *this is a story*. . . . You're enthralled, you're spellbound, if we are doing our work right, but . . . do not confuse this with reality. Art ain't life.

Well, duh. Barth has been known to boost his own high intellectualism with subtle putdowns of his fellow-Chesapeakian James Michener, a quintessentially "popular" writer, and to imply that Michener's readers get so wrapped up in the story as to confuse its fiction with reality. But let's be serious: even the most benighted Michener enthusiast

1 *On with the Story: Stories*, by John Barth; Little, Brown and Company, 257 pages, $23.95.

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doesn't really forget that he is reading a novel; likewise, it is awfully arrogant of Barth to think (if he really does) that his own readers are dumb enough to need the authorial intrusions with which he peppers his novels to remind them of his presence. Every time Barth begins to tell a genuinely compelling tale—and he can do so, when he wants to—he breaks it off, *delectatio interruptus*, with some first-person digression, as though he can't bear to allow his readers the unworthy, unintellectual pleasure of losing themselves within a story. But could anyone reading a Barth novel ever forget he is reading a novel, or rather, "literature"? Certainly not with prose like the following, from *On with the Story*:

> Supreme in this category of human constructions to be farewelled—so much so, to this fareweller, as to be virtually a category in itself—was that most supple, versatile, and ubiquitous of humanisms, language: that tool that deconstructs and reconstructs its own constructions; that uses and builds its users and builders as they use, build and build with it. Ta-ta language, la la language, the very diction of veridiction in this valley valedictory. Adieu, addio, adios, et cetera und so weiter; he could no more bear to say *good-bye* to you than to say to those nearest dearest, in particular the nearest-dearest, so to say, themof: He meant the without-whom-nothing for him to bid farewell to whom must strain the sine qua non of language even unto the sine-quanonsense.

This is the work of someone who has fallen so deeply in love with his own voice that fiction is at an end; all that remains is a narcissistic celebration of self. Barth is far more interested in his own cogitations on art and narrative form than he is in any of his characters.

Which means that his characters tend to be uninteresting to the reader as well, and far too often are merely stand-ins for himself. This has been commented upon before, to disingenuous expressions of annoyance from Barth. Autobiographical connection-making is, he says, "finally impertinent. It beggars [the author's] capacities of invention and transmutation." In that case, why repeatedly invent and transmute middle-aged, male fiction-writers who are divorced and happily remarried, teach at universities, and enjoy sailing on the Chesapeake Bay? Is the reader supposed to eschew all connections of character with author? Is he not even to be allowed the pleasure of trying to figure out, as with Philip Roth's novels, which facets of the character are autobiographical and which are not?

"Fiction has always been about fiction," Barth has said. This is a problematic statement, rather easy for Barth from his lofty position as a postmodern professor of writing and literature to make. Studied in depth, and in context with the entire history of literature, it can indeed be demonstrated that fiction is "about fiction." Yet I doubt that Chaucer with *The Canterbury Tales*, or Richardson with *Clarissa*, or Conrad with *Lord Jim*, were overwhelmingly conscious, during composition, of writing "about fiction." Before the modernist movement only a very few great authors, Sterne or Cervantes for instance, demonstrated a Barthian preoccupation with form for its own sake. Yet Barth does not hesitate to make the questionable assertion that fiction that "aspires to become part of the history of fiction is almost always about itself."

Barth is consciously writing for the ages, and there seems no doubt that he aspires for his own fiction to become part of the history of fiction. Whether it will or not is another story. In my opinion, his later work is likeliest to appeal to the reader who shares Barth's narcissism and is primarily interested in literature insofar as it reflects his own erudition and displays his ability to pick up references and paradoxes. In *On with the Story* Barth deplores writers who die too young, such as Keats, and their opposite numbers, those who go "on being and being *after* one's pen has gleaned et cetera: not so much a pity as simply pathetic." Barth is making a fair bid to join the latter

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category. "The Literature of Exhaustion" is still a meaningful phrase, but thirty years on it seems not so much the genre that is exhausted but the over-taxed powers of innovation in Barth and some of his postmodern contemporaries.

One contemporary who has not worried himself about "making it new" is William Trevor, an artist who gives no evidence of ever having considered whether his genre might or might not be exhausted. In fact the work of writers like Trevor should in itself be sufficient to prove that fiction is very far from being exhausted, and that "experimentation" is a term that covers a lot of territory. Trevor, a writer whom most people would describe as traditional, has made a deeply intelligent comment upon the nature of artistic experiment:

> I think all writing is experimental. The very obvious sort of experimental writing is not really more experimental than that of a conventional writer like myself. I experiment all the time but the experiments are hidden. Rather like abstract art: you look at an abstract picture, and then you look at a close-up of a Renaissance painting and find the same abstractions.

This is in its way a revolutionary observation, and should challenge anyone's false notion that unobtrusive effects are somehow easier for the author to achieve than dramatic ones. Trevor's extremely unobtrusive writing is, in fact, the finished product of a lifetime's toil. He is one of the rare serious writers who is not afraid to let his characters' voices obscure his own; it is a mark both of his skill and his humanity. As for showy postmodern stylistics: "Fashion belongs on a coat-hanger. In literature—in any art—it's destructive."

Nevertheless, Trevor, with his delicacy, fine observation, and empathy, is more truly a successor to his compatriot Joyce than is Barth—to the Joyce of *Dubliners*, at any rate. He has made some highly successful forays into the novel form, including *The Old Boys* (1964), *The Children of Dynmouth* (1977), and last year's *Felicia's Journey*, but Trevor affirms, "I am a short story writer, I believe, who also happens to write novels, not the other way around." The publication of his collected stories by Penguin in 1993 brought together an important body of work, new to many American readers.

Over the decades Trevor's fiction has become noticeably less harsh and unpleasant, the misanthropic comedy of *The Old Boys* mellowing into a detached tone in which pity rather than judgment is the dominant note. Trevor grew up a Protestant in Ireland—not a grand Protestant of the "Ascendancy" but a lower-middle class, "lace-curtain" Protestant—and though he has long since left his native country to live in Dorset and Italy, he has retained the personal sense of being an outsider, "which," he has said, "I think all writers have to be."

Whether or not it has anything to do with his outsider status, Trevor's primary gift is undoubtedly his ability to get *inside* his characters. His new collection, *After Rain*[2] is notable for the tremendous variety of characters—various in social class, age, and sex—that Trevor is able to inhabit. Six of the eleven stories in the collection are about women; middle-aged women are something of a specialty with Trevor. Children, an inarticulate potato-dealer, a piece of homosexual rough trade, a couple of thugs are all made emotionally comprehensible; posh Londoners and Irish peasantry, Catholics and Protestants are treated without discrimination. "I have never believed in the axiom that a writer should first and foremost write about what he knows," he has stated. "I think it's a piece of misinformation."

In the title story, Harriet, a thirtyish Englishwoman, makes a sentimental visit after the breakup of a love affair to the Italian *pensione* she came to with her parents as a child. With expertise, Trevor draws to-

2 *After Rain*, by William Trevor; Viking, 213 pages, $22.95.

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gether the parallel strands of her thoughts: she reflects upon her own repeated failures at love while simultaneously being confronted everywhere with early memories of her parents in the years before their unexpected divorce—a reality she still fails to understand, for her family had seemed perfectly happy together.

> At the time it didn't seem unreal or artificial. Their smiling faces didn't, nor the pleasure they seemed to take in poky French hotels where only the food was good, nor their chattering to one another in the front of the car, their badinage and arguments. Yet retrospect insisted that reality was elsewhere; that reality was surreptitious lunches with two other people, and afternoon rooms, and guile; that reality was a web of lies until one of them found out, it didn't matter which; that reality was when there had to be something better than what the family offered.

Harriet is finally offered insight into her own personal failures, not in a flash of knowledge but in a fleeting, almost epiphanic moment of beauty.

"The Potato Dealer," like Trevor's earlier stories "The Ballroom of Romance" and "The Property of Colette Nervi," tells of a marriage of convenience in rural Ireland. One of the finest pieces in the collection, it paints a culture of almost inconceivable emotional bleakness; the inhabitants of this world do not seek personal happiness, for it never occurs to them that such a thing might come their way. Only survival and a kind of grim respectability are to be aspired to. Ellie, made pregnant by a visiting curate, is married off by her family to Mulreavy, a middle-aged potato dealer; in return, he will be made heir to the small family farm.

The marriage is never consummated, for the principals look on it purely as a business proposition. "Ellie accepted with equanimity what there was. She lived a little in the past, in the summer of her love affair, expecting of the future only what she knew of the present. . . . She knew it couldn't be: a priest was a priest." Yet by a masterful trick of perspective, Trevor finally works it so that it is not Ellie who most insistently claims the reader's empathy but the impassive, undemanding Mulreavy, fond of the little child who thinks he is her father and whom Ellie eventually disabuses of that illusion in a passionate but misguided impulse for truth-telling. To Mulreavy's feelings in the matter she gives no thought. "She mended his clothes, she kept them clean. She assisted him in the fields, she made his bed. In all the time she'd known him she had never wondered about him." If many of Trevor's stories recall Joyce's, this one carries a far stronger whiff of Thomas Hardy.

Perhaps the most harrowing story in the collection is "A Day." The day in question is an uneventful July one, in the life of Mrs. Lethwes, an upper-middle-class woman in her mid-forties who goes about her quotidian tasks of shopping, cooking, and supervising the maid and gardener while her husband is at the office. As her reflections develop, it becomes evident that her feelings of malaise and uselessness stem from a real despair at her childless state. A few years earlier the Lethwes had thought about adoption; her husband had been eager, but she had balked at taking in an Asian child; now it is too late, and she is inconsolable. Even the discovery that her husband is in love with a female colleague means nothing to her save giving her the improbable hope that the two will have an illegitimate child that might somehow, magically, be passed on to her. As the day progresses, Mrs. Lethwes drinks herself into unconsciousness. Trevor has made this banal but desperate woman tragic; even more impressively, he has, with only a few words, made her husband tragic, too.

The most complex and ambitious story of the collection is "Last Call." In the apple orchard one day, Milton Leeson, a fifteen-year-old boy from a Protestant farm family, is visited by an odd woman who says that she is Saint Rosa, and kisses him. After a

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second vision, Milton is increasingly disturbed; he asks advice from his brother-in-law, who is a vicar, then from the local Catholic priest, but each is far more concerned with the political than the spiritual implications: the vicar feels that Milton has been polluted by Papist superstition, while the priest is furious that a holy saint should choose to make herself manifest to a Protestant boy. Matters come to a head during the July celebration, the annual Protestant festival honoring King William's 1690 victory over the Catholic James II in which local Protestants put all their chauvinism and belligerence on display. Milton finds himself inspired to begin preaching in public places. His parents, appalled, lock him up, and eventually the family settles matters in the tradition of their culture's exceedingly rough forms of justice.

Another veteran short story writer with a new book out is Tobias Wolff, author of the previous collections *In the Garden of the North American Martyrs* (1981) and *Back in the World* (1985), as well as *The Barracks Thief* (1985), a novel, and the memoirs *This Boy's Life* (1989) and *In Pharaoh's Army* (1994). A stylistic traditionalist whose heroes are Hemingway, Cheever, Maupassant, and Anderson, Wolff admits to being a little impatient with postmodern baroque. "I'm not hostile to experimental fiction," he says, "but there's a kind of self-indulgence that just doesn't interest me." The stories in his new collection, *The Night in Question*,[3] are stylistically in harmony with the American masters mentioned above, but written with a markedly different socio-economic slant: a significant number of his characters inhabit a Catholic, blue-collar world which Wolff depicts with precision and, often, with poetry. In his treatment of this milieu, and of life in the ranks of the American military, Wolff has few peers. His economical, pointed prose and his sensitivity to emotional nuance make his work consistently worth reading.

The stories in *The Night in Question* possess all these qualities, but by and large they suffer from inexplicable compositional defects. "The Life of the Body," for instance, begins with great style and force: Wiley, an unmarried high-school teacher of overweening intellectual confidence and great personal self-control, gets unwontedly drunk at a bar and pesters an attractive woman. The anarchy that Wiley glimpses within himself as a result of this lapse, and the imbalance that the incident continues to bring into his life, form a discrete and quite perfect story. Yet Wolff continues the action almost aimlessly. Wiley's fibs about the reason for his black eye introduce racial tension into his classroom. He is ministered to by his best friend's wife; in the course of their conversations, ten years' history is gone over, so that it becomes evident that Wiley is himself in love with her. These digressions soften the story's edges. What, then, is the point of them? It almost seems as though "The Life of the Body" started out as a novel, then got abandoned. Otherwise, why all the dropped threads and extraneous themes?

A story with similar problems is "Flyboys," a meandering narrative about three elementary school boys and their shifting relationships. The boys and their families are established quickly and with skill, but too many characters are introduced and left hanging, too many themes are suggested and not followed up, and the story is never given a proper ending, although several suggest themselves. Again, it would seem that "Flyboys" contains the germ of a novel, subsequently dropped; the same is true of "Two Boys and a Girl," in which two different stories seem to be competing for space. If Barth takes too seriously Chekhov's admonition to fire every gun that's hung on the wall, Wolff doesn't take it seriously enough.

Nevertheless, there is enough good writing in this collection to make it worthwhile, and some of the stories are neat, unified

3 *The Night in Question: Stories*, by Tobias Wolff; Knopf, 211 pages, $23.

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pieces of work that raise interesting questions of perspective and personality. In "Migraine," for instance, Wolff creates an unreliable protagonist whose extreme emotional rationalizations are presented from the protagonist's own point of view, as though they were reasonable. "Smorgasbord" is an offbeat, blackly funny narrative of three prep-school boys on a night out. "The Other Miller" presents a startling vision of the inner life of a man wholly out of touch with his own, intense, feelings. "Casualty" and "Sanity" are two other fine stories in the best tradition of the American short story.

Though Tobias Wolff is not really in the class of William Trevor, the common strengths of these two very different authors demonstrate that, Barth and his dithering notwithstanding, fiction is still alive, "experimental" writing is not an absolute but a question of perspective and attitude, and, most importantly, that pure style—as good and necessary as it undoubtedly is—cannot continue to exist without substance.

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Books

Losing Virgil

by John Herington

Virgil in English belongs to the new Penguin series of Poets in Translation,[1] which (alleges the back cover) "offers the best translations in English, through the centuries, of the major classical and European poets." For the common reader, and even for the not-so-common reader, it is hard to imagine a more attractive project than that. If it were rightly executed, a volume of the kind promised would present at least three very great benefits. A reader who did not know the language used by the poet concerned would here be brought as near as he could hope to get to the singing voice of the master, and to those all-important imponderables that a literal prose translation can hardly supply—the mood, the atmosphere, the variations of tone and pace. A lifelong student of the poet, as well as an amateur, would find pleasure here, and insight too: since any really sensitive translation will bring out details, if not entire dimensions, that the reader has missed before. Finally, such a book would constitute an enjoyable mini-anthology of poetry in English, given unity by the common focus on a single foreign poet and yet full of shocks and surprises, bringing to light unknown poems and juxtaposing poems never before seen on the same page. If humanism has something to do with a deeper feeling for the powers of one's own language, and at the same time a wider awareness of the richness of other epochs and other nations, then here—or so one would hope—we have the humanistic textbooks for our time.

These expectations are in fact largely fulfilled by the remarkable *Horace in English* in the same series, which has already been reviewed in these pages.[2] Horace, it must be admitted, was an outstandingly suitable subject for such an anthology; for over the last four centuries an astonishing number of persons who mattered in literature or even in politics, from Queen Elizabeth I through Aphra Behn to President John Quincy Adams and beyond, have felt the urge (which can be overpowering) to translate one Horatian poem or another, often with unexpected felicity. Virgil, from this point of view, is a very different matter. Through the ages he has proved something like a Mount Everest to translators or imitators—the most towering and treacherous peak of all, scarcely to be attempted except by the heroic or the unwise. For this is that Virgil whom the Emperor Severus Alexander called (in a phrase that almost seems too good to have been thought up by a Roman dynast of the Low Empire) "the Plato of the poets." This is he before whom Dante, of all people, abased himself as his master in style. This is the poet who haunted—it is a curious fact that anyone who talks about Virgil

1 *Virgil in English*, edited by K. W. Gransden; Penguin Books, 346 pages, $14.95 paper.

2 See the review by Donald Lyons, "Englishing the 'Odes,'" in *The New Criterion* (June 1996).

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lapses at some point into the vocabulary of the supernatural—who haunted the literature of the Western world without a break from the reign of Augustus to the reign of Victoria. Yet for some reason Virgil has been hard to imitate even in his own language, let alone in any other. "You could sooner filch his club from Hercules than a line from Virgil," said a wise Roman critic. The problem of translating him into a modern language was neatly formulated by Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Dryden*:

> The discriminative excellence of Homer is elevation and comprehension of thought, and that of Virgil is grace and splendour of diction. The beauties of Homer are therefore difficult to be lost, and those of Virgil difficult to be retained.

To "grace and splendour of diction" most admirers of Virgil would add something that Johnson probably took for granted, and that is the music of his verse. There is a case for thinking of him as the Beethoven, as well as the Plato, of the poets.

Whether or not for these reasons, it seems to be the fact that no really outstanding poet of the English-speaking world has ever dared to translate Virgil's works as a whole, except John Dryden. In our century two fine poets, Cecil Day Lewis and Robert Fitzgerald, have translated, respectively, the complete works and the *Aeneid*. The volume under review also includes the work of a number of other fine poets who attempted only bits and pieces of Virgil, for example the Earl of Surrey, Denham, Godolphin, Fanshawe, Cowley, Addison, Wordsworth, and Seamus Heaney. Finally, it includes a long train of versifiers who were not primarily poets by vocation but are known only, or mainly, for their translations from the classics. These are indeed a diverse lot, ranging in quality from Bishop Gavin Douglas, whose Scots *Aeneid* (composed about 1513) is a major poem in its own right, down to certain professional classicists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who—as we shall shortly see—had the misfortune to translate into a poetic idiom decades or even centuries earlier than their time, or into no poetic idiom at all.

Thus anyone who set out to form an anthology of verse translations from Virgil would have a rather limited pool to choose from, even if he took account of some competent, or more than competent, versions that do not appear in this volume; for example, the mid-eighteenth-century *Aeneid* by Christopher Pitt, which Samuel Johnson actually bracketed with Dryden's ("the two best translations that perhaps were ever produced by one nation of the same author"); or the *Georgics* by the versatile William Sotheby (1800), or the *Eclogues* and *Georgics* by R. C. Trevelyan (1944), or the *Aeneid* of the gifted contemporary translator C. H. Sisson (1986). But an anthologist of the *best* translations of Virgil, the kind of translations that this series explicitly promises, would be very much more restricted in his choice, and would almost certainly have to come up with a slimmer volume than the one before us. I would invite the reader to bear in mind Virgil's stature as a verse craftsman ("Wielder of the stateliest measure/ ever moulded by the lips of man") while he or she pronounces aloud the following gruesome specimens of English style and versification, all from *Virgil in English*. James Henry (1853) gives us Aeneas and the sibyl among the monsters at Hell's gate:

> Here Eneas his sword grasps
> In sudden alarm,
> And presents the drawn edge
> To them coming onward,
> And seems to be bent
> (Were it not for the warning
> His skilled comrade gives him
> That they're nothing but thin
> Unsubstantial souls flitting)
> To rush in upon them,
> And, all to no purpose,
> Cleave the shadows in sunder.

Or here is John Conington (1867) with the image of the she-wolf nursing Romulus and

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Remus on the shield wrought by Vulcan for Aeneas:

> There too the mother wolf he made
> In Mars's cave supinely laid:
> Around her udders undismayed
> The gamesome infants hung,
> While she, her loose neck backward thrown,
> Caressed them fondly, one by one,
> And shaped them with her tongue.

R. D. Blackmore (1871) renders the farmer's problems from *Georgics* I:

> And yet, when carls and beeves have done
> their best,
> The reprobate goose will prove no trifling
> pest.

C. W. Brodribb (1928) attempts the opening of the passage in *Georgics* III that, taking its start from the farmer's need to repress the sex drive in horses and cattle, becomes a great hymn to the universal power of love. The English lines are meant as dactylic hexameters:

> And never is discipline more forcefully
> invigorating
> Than when unexcited love's blind
> provocation is absent:
> Steers be it or stallions, as custom mostly
> commendeth.
> Wherefore men set apart their bulls and give
> them a pasture
> In solitude, a river's prisoners or penn'd
> on a hillside;
> Or shut up in their stalls they find them
> plenty withindoors . . .

All the above versifiers were distinguished classical scholars, with the exception of Blackmore, who has a better title to fame in *Lorna Doone*. And to each of them Mr. Gransden allots not just a few specimen lines (which might have served as warnings, or for comic relief), but several pages. It is in general hard to make out what principles, if any, have guided him in deciding which translators to include in the collection, or the relative lengths of the extracts from each of them. We should be grateful to him for the good translations of Virgil that he here restores to public view (the *Georgics* of Thomas May from 1628, for instance; or Sidney Godolphin's superb *Aeneid* IV, published in 1658; or William Morris's archaistic but powerful *Aeneid* of 1876), but the trouble is that they are given almost equal time and space with mediocre verses (Luke Milbourne's *Aeneid* I of 1688, or Joseph Warton's *Eclogues* of 1777) and verses that can only be rated as candidates for a future edition of *The Stuffed Owl* (see the extracts from the *Classical Essays* of F. W. H. Myers, 1883).

It is equally hard to make out any system in the selection of the Virgilian passages to be reproduced in translation. Some parts of Virgil are represented repeatedly; for example, Mr. Gransden has us plow through three translations, none of them specially noteworthy, of the second eclogue ("that horrid one," as Byron called it, "Beginning with *Formosum pastor Corydon*"). On the other hand, the fourth, "Messianic," eclogue, the most famous of them all, is given to one translator only, and that the least fitted by temperament to bring across its eerie beauty, namely John Dryden. And the episode of Orpheus and Eurydice from the end of *Georgics* IV, which to many has seemed the ultimate in all tragic poetry and in all verbal music, is represented only by the perfectly competent version of Smith Palmer Bovie. I cannot help thinking that the young Wordsworth's unfinished but moving version (1788) of the same episode might at least have deserved a mention. But alas, the only Wordsworth included in this anthology is taken from his version of parts of the *Aeneid*—a version which the poet himself (in a letter to the *Philological Museum*, which published it in 1832) gloomily characterized as "an experiment—for it was nothing more—and I now think it a less fortunate one than when I first named it to you," and never reprinted. Yet here it is anyway, in this volume, supposedly among "the best translations in English."

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The extracts of the translations are annotated more or less at random. Some receive no footnotes at all, others are thickly encrusted with notes, many of them beginning "Cf." (a favorite expression of the editor) but containing no more than unadorned line-references to the Latin texts of Virgil's works. The footnotes, especially, make one wonder whether the editor ever paused to consider what kind of reader he was addressing. Whoever this strange being is, he apparently needs to be told that *parlous* means "perilous" and that *to divine* means "to guess," and that Remus was Romulus's brother; while at the same time he needs no explanation of the words *theave* or *queachie*, or any help in identifying persons called Hippotades or Aeolides.

Sometimes help comes, but comes too late; the editor has a curious habit of explaining words or names at their second appearance in a given extract, or even later. For example, the word *but* as a preposition meaning "without," which occurs five times in the extract from Gavin Douglas's magnificently vital *Aeneid* ("A sword but help about hym beltis he"—i.e. the aged Priam at the sack of Troy) may well puzzle many readers at first glance; only by the time one has worked it out for oneself, that is just one line before the end of the extract, does Mr. Gransden come to the rescue. The assumed reader, though not knowing who Remus is, at least knows his Latin well enough not to require a translation when a Latin passage is quoted at him, as on pages 41 and 237; but he might have some trouble on page 64, where the Latin as quoted makes no sense (read *quis* instead of Mr. Gransden's *quid*). The English poetic texts, too, are deformed by some tricky misprints in half a dozen passages. I will mention only one instance, where it almost seems as if an archaic long *s* has been misread as an *f*. It is at the opening of "Lycidas," where Milton wrote:

> Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
> Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,
> I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,

but *Virgil in English* prints the end of the second line as "Ivy never-fear."

I would end, however, with the one feature of the book that can be praised more or less unreservedly, and that is the series of poems scattered through it that are inspired by Virgil, not translated from him. Together these remind us vividly that almost every English-speaking poet of any consequence, from the time of Chaucer to the time of Auden, went to school with Virgil. The selection offered is satisfactory, though I for one could cheerfully do without the five pages devoted to part of a rather awful pastiche of the *Eclogues* by Ambrose ("Namby Pamby") Philips:

> Soft balmy breezes breathe along the sky:
> The bloomy season of the year is nigh.

Strangely, it is among this series of poems that the English-speaking reader might obtain his clearest sense of the Virgilian qualities that have really excited and awed the ages (though the editor gives him no hint of this). The straight translations—even the eccentric selection of them that is contained in this book—will of course tell him something about the contents of Virgil's work, but very few of them seem to carry across anything like that "grace and splendour of diction," or that perfect control of verbal music, or those nocturnelike ambiguities of color and outline, that distinguish Virgilian poetry. Four of the poems here, in particular, might take the reader some way toward an understanding of this side of Virgil.

To me, one of the book's most delightful surprises was *The Land*, by Victoria ("Vita") Sackville-West, a poem composed in full consciousness of the *Georgics* and viewing, as it were through Virgilian eyes, not the Italian but the southern English countryside. The other poems are fairly obvious choices, but good ones. Tennyson's ode on the nineteenth centenary of Virgil's death must be known to most English-speakers who know of Virgil himself, yet the judg-

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ment of so fine a verbal craftsman is always worth hearing again. And anyone tempted to label either the Augustan or the Victorian poet as a mere drum-beating imperialist may be surprised at the contrast between Tennyson's lyrical praises of the poems of peace, the *Eclogues* and *Georgics*, on the one hand, and his somber reflections about the *Aeneid* on the other; he seems to capture perfectly the *chiaroscuro*, the shadowy ambiguities, of Virgil's own vision of Roman history:

> Thou majestic in thy sadness
> at the doubtful doom of human kind;
>
> Light among the vanish'd ages;
> star that gildest yet the phantom shore;
> Golden branch amid the shadows,
> kings and realms that pass to rise no more.

Finally, two other poems in this group can almost be left to speak (or sing) for themselves. "The Second Pastoral" by Alexander Pope, though youthful work and perhaps not very rich in content, seems to come as near as our language can to the sheer tunefulness of Virgil's Latin. And Milton's "Lycidas," while second only to Pope's poem in its control of sound, succeeds in conveying something that no heroic couplets, whether by Pope or Dryden or anybody else, can ever convey: the momentum of the mature Virgil's periodic style, rising from peak to even higher peak across ten or a dozen lines of poetry.

John Gray's big idea

John Gray Isaiah Berlin.
Princeton University Press,
189 pages, $19.95

reviewed by Daniel J. Silver

It is, of course, a commonplace today that "liberalism" as a peculiarly American political philosophy is on the wane. But what of the much more entrenched tradition of classical liberalism, which encompasses some of the most cherished Western values, such as respect for individual liberties and justice under law? Surprisingly, a number of intellectuals of nonleftist persuasion have come to question the classical liberal tradition, and wondered if the emphasis on individual rights has not masked other values that are important to preserving our way of life. Some of this rethinking has come from a newly resurgent communitarianism, which emphasizes the anchoring of the individual person in a "thick" sense of community, as opposed to the abstract idea of universal human community promoted by liberal theorists like John Rawls or Ronald Dworkin. Some thinkers have even begun to wonder whether liberal-democratic conceptions of state and society are just particular historical manifestations of certain Western communities, which have no universal validity or application—with the final implication being that even in the West this moment may be coming to an end.

Among this last group of pessimists is the noted British Conservative political theorist John Gray, a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford. Not that long ago Gray identified himself as a liberal, but now thinks that liberalism is bankrupt and can no longer function as a living tradition. In the 1980s, Gray was a bright, young Thatcherite on the libertarian fringe—libertarian ideas, a novelty in Britain, having come into Tory thinking with great controversy through Mrs. Thatcher's patronage of certain New Right think tanks. Now Gray calls himself a "postmodern Green conservative," and he has come to his study of Sir Isaiah Berlin—probably the most eminent and celebrated sage of political thought in modern Britain—with a distinct agenda, and it may help first to reconstruct Gray's recent intellectual hegira so as to grasp what he is up to in exploring Sir Isaiah's ideas.

In common with some other conservatives and communitarians, Gray emphasizes the long-neglected importance to modern politics of civil society: the notion that the

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essential glue of society consists in voluntary, loosely rule-bound, private associations that have sprung up over time and provided mediating institutions between the state and individual persons. Drawing on the ideas of Friedrich Hayek, Michael Oakeshott, and James Buchanan, doyen of the American "Public Choice" school, Gray has argued that insofar as the state allows itself to corrupt or encroach upon the social "space" of civil society, either through authoritarian initiatives of its own, or through capture by special interests, it undoes the very bonds of community that lend legitimacy to government.

According to Gray, civil society has taken a savage beating in the wake of Mrs. Thatcher, as he has described in recent books, *Post-Liberalism*, *Beyond the New Right*, and *Enlightenment's Wake*. For one, the New Right emphasis on marketplace forces *über alles* was too successful, as the new American-style libertarians were hell-bent on displacing many desirable features of traditional communal life that undergirded civil society. Second, Tories in power became intoxicated with statist power, reverting to earlier authoritarian Conservative thinking, and despite the agenda of privatizing industry, came to exert even more state control over ordinary people's daily lives, thus displacing private civil associations. Finally, the growth of multiculturalism, connived at by a legalistic state regime imposing factitious minority "rights" on civil society—even more dire in consequence in the United States than in Britain—has undermined traditional communities, replacing them with the ersatz abstraction of "identity-based" group entitlements.

Except for this well-taken final point about multiculturalism, Gray's diagnosis, in its blinkered perspective—apparently affected by internecine Tory wars—leaves much to be desired, as it leaves out so many anti-liberal corrosions of civil society. But even more peculiar than his diagnosis are his conclusions as to the proper treatment of the disease. Gray now feels that the traditional communities of the West have broken down completely and no longer support any efforts to prop them up; in the absence of these foundations we do more harm than good to pretend that traditional communal bonds still exist. The collapse of community shows that our way of life was just a contingent historical event that has now passed—as we have entered a "post-modern" age—and that we had better learn to disabuse ourselves of the "privileging" of liberal-democratic discourse; the notion that liberal values have timeless, universal truth is dangerous self-delusion.

As he describes in *Enlightenment's Wake*, liberalism is but the last to collapse of the illusions fostered by "the Enlightenment project" of bringing "calculative" reason to bear on the human condition. Gray now asks us to turn toward alternative traditions to create a new world: hints are to be found, he tells us, in the "later" Heidegger, the mystical tradition, and in Buddhism. Embracing "Green" thought, he urges us to hew to the earth and to rethink our human chauvinism: apparently, birds and bees and plants and trees are people too.

Such is the strange, sobering odyssey of a conservative, which sets the context for Gray's analysis of Berlin's political thought. To be fair, Gray's Berlin is a relatively scrupulous attempt to reconstruct a semi-coherent political philosophy out of Sir Isaiah's scattered writings. For Gray, however, Berlin is the last liberal, and one who makes his stand in defense of liberalism on grounds that ultimately prove incoherent; thus it is Gray's agenda to show how Berlin's failure to prop up liberalism helps corroborate his own death certificate for the liberal tradition.

In Gray's view, the heart of Berlin's contribution to political thought is his theory of "value-pluralism": the notion that, *pace* Plato and Aristotle, there is no one idea of the Good, which exhibits an essential, if hierarchical, unity, but rather there is a plurality of goods, and in fact they exhibit an inherent incommensurability which renders either unity or hierarchy impossible.

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Gray makes clear that we should not ascribe to this idea the weak thesis that moral values may often be found to conflict with one another. That is a truism, which does not really shake the foundations of Platonic monism. For Gray, Berlin's "subversive" insight is that values can be not just conflicting but fully incommensurable, meaning that they cannot be measured on the same scale—thus defeating monism at its heart by showing that no value can be privileged above any other. Put simply, we may pursue many different, unrelated goals in life, and that is the way things are; we do not need a Platonic moralist telling us to shape up and pursue coherent, unified goals toward some higher end as the supposed "real" purpose of life.

If it sounds a bit flip, it is a philosophy earned by fire. Berlin, in common with other Europeans of his generation like Hayek and Karl Popper, formed his ideas in the hellish crucible of totalitarianism. Born in Riga, Latvia, in 1909, Berlin had moved with his family to Petrograd in time to witness the Russian Revolution of February 1917 and then the Bolshevik coup that November. He fled to England in 1921, and was lucky enough, particularly as a Jewish foreigner, to be afforded the kind of education which, along with his gifts, landed him at the Oxford that he was to make his home for most of the rest of his life. (Long retired from teaching, he is still a fellow of All Souls College.) Much of his family was not as lucky, and perished in the Holocaust.

Haunted, then, like so many of his generation by the twin horrors of Soviet Communism and Nazism, he struggled to find political principles that might ensure the survival of human liberty and dignity. Like Hayek in particular, Berlin saw Communism and National Socialism as the final embodiments of rationalism about the human condition taken to abominably dehumanizing extremes. He came to believe that promoting abstract principles divorced from the complexity and sheer messiness of real human lives, however well-intended, would inevitably lead to human destruction and political tyranny. In this line of thinking, to affirm the liberal-humanist abstraction, "the Universal Rights of Man," is to evoke the sulphuric taint of revolutionary terror from the guillotine to the gulag. By contrast, for Berlin, to give pride of place not to universal ideals of justice but to the plurality of human goods is a profoundly humanizing gesture because it frees man from the despotism of reason's striving after unity and coherence.

In a passage quoted by Gray in his book *Post-Liberalism*, Berlin connects clearly the wariness about this century's "political religions," as Gray calls them, with the notion of value-pluralism:

> The conviction that, once the last obstacles—ignorance and irrationality, alienation and exploitation, and their individual and social roots—have been eliminated, true human history, that is, universal harmonious cooperation, will at last begin, is a secular form of what is evidently a permanent need of mankind. But if it is the case that not all ultimate human ends are necessarily compatible, there may be no escape from choices governed by no overriding principle, some among them painful, both to the agent and to others. From this it would follow that the creation of a social structure that would, at the least, avoid morally intolerable alternatives, may be the best that human beings can be expected to achieve, if too many varieties of positive action are not to be repressed, too many equally valid human goals are not to be frustrated.

There is much that is noble in these sentiments, but Berlin, unfortunately, does not help us discover how we are to find a safe harbor from morally intolerable alternatives if we are devoid of principles with which to give order to moral choices. As is hinted at in this passage, and expressly alleged by Gray, Berlin believes that all acts of moral choice are irrational: since we cannot weigh incommensurable goods, we have no rational principle of choice; apparently we gamble on the alternatives. How any form of political system could help ensure the in-

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tegrity of such irrational choice-making is quite mysterious. According to Gray, Berlin feels that the liberal tradition best fosters the opportunity to preserve this blessed plurality of choices because of "negative liberty": the mere absence of coercion by the state, or tolerated by the state, of individual human will. This negative virtue of the liberal polity at least leaves people free to do, well, practically any stupid thing they want to do. This doesn't seem much like a political philosophy at all, but a form of quietism at best.

Gray does not find this a satisfactory defense of liberalism either, but for different reasons. For Gray, Berlin's value-pluralism holds the trump card over his liberalism. If no value can be privileged above others, how can Berlin say that the liberal value of negative liberty is what stands between us and the abyss? What he has affirmed is just the essential incoherence of the tradition, which has no universalist claims but only particularist claims that arise out of Western "forms of life" and that may not be replicated anywhere else. In fact, for the postmodernist Gray, promoting liberalism may be a jingoist act, thwarting the plural goods to be realized out of other native traditions. So committed is Gray to the notion that no good can come from outside a matrix of communal values that he endorses the abstract principle that any non-liberal community that stays intact, unlike our own, could promote even better ways of life than what we have cherished in the West. This far, I think, Sir Isaiah, even with his radical beliefs, would not be tempted to tread.

What sense, we must ultimately ask, does it make to trash our own traditions? Berlin, it seems to me, would rather live with the incoherence of his ideas, if that is the case, than give up his humanism and his liberal faith. If Berlin has not come up with a successful political philosophy, as I believe is the case, his is an honorable failure because it was undertaken in the right spirit—indeed, a liberal spirit in the widest sense of the word. He is, after all, the product of an older academic tradition, whose worst excess was a kind of unworldly donnishness. Gray, on the other hand, inhabits the market-ridden milieu of the contemporary university, where there now resides a malign willingness to sacrifice liberality, humanism, and even truth to the Next Big Idea. If "postmodern Green conservatism" is the next big idea then we can only hope that the complete marginalization of academic political theory that would doubtless ensue could be followed not by new ideas but by respect for what we, barely, still have.

Author? Author?

Eric Sams, editor
Shakespeare's "Edward III."
Yale University Press,
242 pages, $30

reviewed by Paul Dean

"Was there ever . . . such stuff as great part of Shakespeare? Only one must not say so!" Thus King George III. If His Majesty jibbed at *Hamlet* or *The Tempest*, what would he have said to *Fair Em, the Miller's Daughter of Manchester, with the Love of William the Conqueror*? Or to *A Most Pleasant Comedy of Mucedorus, the King's Son of Valentia, and Amadine, the King's Daughter of Aragon: with the Merry Conceits of Mouse*? These plays are among no fewer than forty-two which have, at various times, been wholly or partly ascribed to Shakespeare in addition to the thirty-six printed in the First Folio of 1623. Many are now known to be by other dramatists, or to have been given to Shakespeare on patently absurd grounds—some on no grounds at all. C. F. Tucker Brooke edited fourteen of the "doubtful" plays in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (Oxford, 1908), a volume which, amazingly, has never been updated, although editions of individual plays have continued to appear. Only two additions to the corpus established by the First Folio have won general scholarly acceptance: *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kins-*

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men, both believed to be only partly by Shakespeare (though Dr. Sams insists that *Pericles* is his throughout), but omitted from the Folio not on that account—since it included *Henry VIII*—but perhaps because of copyright difficulties. Apart from these, "Hand D" in the manuscript of the collaborative play *Sir Thomas More* has long been accepted as Shakespeare's.

Not all the plays printed by Tucker Brooke are lacking in literary or theatrical merit. *Arden of Faversham* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*—domestic tragedies based on contemporary scandals—retain a grim, terse power, and M. L. Wine, who edited *Arden* for the prestigious Revels series, would not rule out the possibility of Shakespeare's having had a hand in it. The strongest case for Shakespeare's authorship, however, has been made out for *Edward III*, a history play of remarkable distinction which fuses a chronicle dramatization of Edward's military conquest of France and the soldierly apprenticeship of the Black Prince with a romance plot in which Edward attempts to entice the Countess of Salisbury to become his mistress but is convinced by her argument that he is abusing his royal power in seeking to compel her to commit adultery. The play probably dates from circa 1590; there are some allusions to the Armada which must have been topical, and it was entered on the Stationers' Register in 1595, published a year later, and reprinted in 1599. Dr. Sams suggests that a first draft was made in about 1589 and revised some four years later (a ballad, apparently drawing on the play, was registered in March 1593), thus accounting for any stylistic discontinuities. No author is named on the title page; it was ascribed to Shakespeare only in 1656 and first properly edited, as "a Play thought to be writ by Shakespeare," by Edward Capell in 1760. Tucker Brooke attributed it to Peele. There have been four published editions subsequent to his, none wholly satisfactory, and one advertised as "forthcoming" by Richard Proudfoot in 1985 has yet to appear. Previous commentators, somewhat impressionistically, have detected a Shakespearean quality in act 1, scene 2, the whole of act 2 (the "Countess scenes"), and act 4, scene 4 (which shows the Black Prince and Lord Audley braving apparently certain doom on the battlefield of Crécy). I shall call these Part A, and the rest Part B. The Oxford Shakespeare omitted the play, although the editors have since repented. Sams is not the first to claim that Shakespeare wrote all of it, but he is the first to provide such a battery of evidence.

Sams is far from being a newcomer to the twilight world of the Shakespeare apocrypha. In 1985 he published an edition of the anonymous manuscript play *Edmund Ironside*, dating it circa 1588 and claiming it as Shakespeare's. The academic profession responded with a withering contempt which did it no credit. Sams responded in turn with shrill petulance—which did him no credit either—but also with a torrent of other publications, most recently *The Real Shakespeare: Retrieving the Early Years (1564–94)* (Yale, 1995), which oppose a number of scholarly orthodoxies. He believes Shakespeare commenced as a dramatist much earlier than is usually supposed, that none of the plays before *The Two Noble Kinsmen* was collaborative, and that a number of texts traditionally explained as "bad quartos" or memorial reconstructions of Shakespeare were in fact early drafts.

The consensus against Sams on these points, although still formidable, is not as absolute as it once was. Within the last two years Alan Hughes and Jonathan Bate, in separate editions of *Titus*, have argued for a date of composition around 1593, but both concede that this may have been a revision of an earlier draft (which Hughes is even willing to assign to 1588), and both believe the play to be Shakespeare's sole work; Michael Hattaway, the most recent editor of the *Henry VI* trilogy (with which *Edward III* has strong links), thinks all three plays had been written by 1592, again by Shakespeare alone. Unfortunately, in the case of *King John*, another play reminiscent of *Edward III*, there is no agreement: A. R. Braunmul-

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ler's edition plumping for 1595–6, L. A. Beaurline's for 1590. The date you choose depends partly on whether you think *The Troublesome Reign of King John* (printed 1591) is Shakespeare's source or derives from him; for Sams it is Shakespeare's early version. Finally, Laurie E. Maguire in *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The "Bad" Quartos and their Contexts* (Cambridge, 1996) concludes that the quarto versions of *2* and *3 Henry VI*, which differ widely from the Folio texts, are not memorial reconstructions, and she has telling criticism to make of that whole theory. With such tacit support, Sams may feel the academic tide is turning.

Sams is unquestionably industrious and energetic. He provides a fairly lightly edited text of *Edward III*, sixty-seven pages of notes tracing minute links between its language and that of Shakespeare's known works, a further sixty pages of discussion of its critical reception and further evidence for Shakespeare's authorship, and appendices on the implications for study of *Edmund Ironside* and *Sir Thomas More*. Since even those who deny Shakespeare the whole play admit that his hand is detectable in both plot areas (the Countess and the French wars), there is a *prima facie* case to answer.

Sams rejects the division between Parts A and B, surely rightly. Like *Henry V* (which, interestingly, dates from the same year, 1599, in which *Edward III* was reprinted), *Edward III* juxtaposes themes of sexual and martial conquest, government of self and state, and princely education in chivalry, the Countess parts and the French parts being analogous. Sams is able to show parallels to the canonical plays throughout the text. These parallels are not just a matter of a word occurring in two texts, but of repeated sequences of words and corresponding sequences of thought and imagery. Cumulatively they carry a great deal of weight. Other evidence which seems to me to be persuasive includes the use, in Part B as well as A, of the copy of Froissart's *Chronicles* owned by Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain of whose company Shakespeare was a member; allusions to other Shakespeare plays and poems pre-1594 (the direct quotation of a line from the then unpublished Sonnet 94, "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds," is only the best known example), together with the glancing references to Edward III in Shakespeare's later histories, especially, again, *Henry V*—all of which look like mischievous self-allusions; use of image-clusters and stylistic features urged by other writers as typically Shakespearean when found in authentic plays; and evidence from vocabulary.

This last has become dauntingly technical in recent years with the advent of computer linguistics. Eliot Slater, in *The Problem of "The Reign of King Edward III": A Statistical Approach* (Cambridge, 1988), showed from an analysis of rare-word usage that there was an overwhelming probability of *Edward III*'s being wholly by Shakespeare, Part A having close affinities with *King John* (for which he accepted a date in the mid-1590s), Part B with *Titus* and the *Henry VI* plays. Slater's findings have been disputed by other stylometrists but, as Sams reports, they have made no strong case against *Edward III*. Besides, Sams has abundant examples of words occurring in the play which are listed as Shakespearean coinages and/or unique to him both in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and in Onions's *Shakespeare Glossary*. Most telling, perhaps, is the argument from palaeography. Sams enumerates twenty-six features common to Hand D in the *More* manuscript, which have been used to show that it is Shakespeare's, and the manuscript which may be inferred to underlie the printed text of *Edward III*.

I find it hard to deny that Sams has proved his case and that, consequently, *Edward III* is Shakespeare's unaided work. He then "seeks to show that *Ironside* is from the same hand as *Edward III*; so all who accept the latter as partly or wholly Shakespearean should also in equity accept the former, 'execrable' or not, in its entirety." This is not quite logical, since it would be open to someone who denied Shakespeare's sole

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authorship of *Edward III* to attribute parallels in *Ironside* to his collaborator; but I have ruled that position out. Eliot Slater, in an appendix to his book on *Edward III*, supported the Shakespearean authorship of *Ironside* having applied his rare-word tests to that play; he found it correlated very closely with *Titus*, *1* and *3 Henry VI*. Again the handwriting evidence is strong—perhaps more so since we have the *Ironside* manuscript and need not infer it from a printed text. Many of the Hand D features Sams has identified as Shakespearean in *Edward III* are also found in Hand D and *Ironside*; and the imagery as well as much of the stagecraft of *Ironside* correlates more closely with *Titus Andonicus*, the *Henry VI* trilogy, and *Richard III* than with any later work in the canon. Its villain, Edricus, anticipates Aaron in *Titus*, or Richard III himself. Sams's conclusion is, as before, that *Ironside* was written by Shakespeare in about 1588 and that he reworked its materials in the better-known plays.

Why should anyone want to deny this? Because, critics say, it does not "feel" as though Shakespeare could have written *Ironside*; it is too poor a play, too unlike him in theme and treatment.[1] Sams is uncompromising here, quoting the dictum of Samuel Schoenbaum (whom he elsewhere attacks) that "intuitions, convictions and subjective judgments generally, carry no weight as evidence. This no matter how learned, respected or confident the authority." Yet it is not just a matter of the quality of a single text. T. S. Eliot well says, in his essay on John Ford, that "the full meaning of any one of [Shakespeare's] plays is not in itself alone, but in that play in the order in which it was written, in its relation to all of Shakespeare's other plays, earlier and later: we must know all of Shakespeare's work in order to know any of it"—a view he later distills into the aphorism, "the whole of Shakespeare is *one* poem." A massive sense of coherence emerges from a reading of all thirty-seven canonical plays. I would connect this with the tradition, which like Sams I accept, that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic: his mind has as much organic unity as that of Aquinas. Sams's detective work has, at some stage, been caused by his response to what he perceives as Shakespearean "fingerprints" in the plays; he *is* saying, "This feels like Shakespeare," and I think it reasonable to concede some validity to the opposite feeling. After all, when the early Christian Church had to decide which of the many gospels were going to be sanctioned as canonical and which rejected as suspect, the decisions were surely made—divine guidance apart—on the grounds of just such hunches and intuitions, rather than statistical or manuscript considerations. (I sometimes indulge the wicked fantasy that Sams is working on an edition of the Gospel of Thomas, designed to prove its Shakespearean authorship.)

Of course it would be absurd to say that Shakespeare never wrote badly: but, in fact, much of *Ironside* is not written badly; and if one accepts a date of 1588 or 1589, it is perfectly plausible to say that this is early Shakespeare rather than someone else recollecting or imitating later Shakespeare. The neo-Senecan mode and archaic diction, tolerable in the late 1580s, would have been fustian a generation later. Sams rightly regrets that so few critics have any expertise in palaeographical skills such as the dating of paper; an expert ought to examine and report on the likely dating of the *Ironside* manuscript. Moreover, in the British Library's MS Egerton 1994, the manuscript collection which contains *Ironside*, is an anonymous history play on the reign of Richard II, generally known as *Woodstock*. This, too, is of unusually high quality, and Ian Robinson, in a pamphlet now out of print (*"Richard II" and "Woodstock,"* Bryn-

1 Recently, a more positive discussion, although agnostic on the authorship question, has come from Larry S. Champion in his useful book *"The Noise of the Threatening Drum": Dramatic Strategy and Political Ideology in Shakespeare and the English Chronicle Plays* (Newark, 1990).

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mill Press, 1988) felt inclined to give it to Shakespeare. Again, a comparison of its manuscript features with those of *Edward III*, *Ironside* and Hand D seems overdue.

Robinson's one doubt about Sams's case for *Ironside* is whether it matters that Shakespeare wrote it or not (Robinson has a low opinion of the play). I should say it mattered a great deal, that we cannot know too much about Shakespeare's working practices,[2] and that Sams and his enemies would serve us all much better if they could discuss things in a calm frame of mind. As things stand, Heminges and Condell's confidence, in their preface to the First Folio, that Shakespeare's "wit can no more lie hid than it could be lost," rings more than a little hollow.

Semper fidelis

Harry Francis Mallgrave
Gottfried Semper: Architect
of the Nineteenth Century.
Yale University Press, 443 pages, $50

reviewed by J. Duncan Berry

In the preface to his classic study of Albrecht Dürer, Erwin Panofsky referred to high- and postmedieval European art as a grand fugue that, as it was most often played, lacked a distinctively Germanic voice. In contrast to that of their more celebrated peers in France, the reputation of German artists in subsequent eras does not appear to have risen much higher. This is complicated by the irony that Germany's notoriously chauvinistic art-historical establishment deprecated her uniquely important contributions to the evolution of post-Enlightenment architecture, its pedagogy, and its theory. Whether seen from a classic or romantic point of view, many of the enduring features of twentieth-century architecture and theory reflect specifically Teutonic concerns that were either later attributed to the French (by Siegfried Giedion), to the English (first by Hermann Muthesius then a generation later by Nikolaus Pevsner), or seen as an aesthetic dead end. Harry Francis Mallgrave, who is editor of architecture and aesthetics for the Texts & Documents Series at the Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, has toiled for over a decade to correct these errors. His stunning new biography of the architect Gottfried Semper (1803–1879) is bound to exert a healthy influence on the way we approach the aesthetic achievements of the nineteenth century—and the twentieth.

If remembered at all by the public today, Semper's name is associated with a handful of historicist gems that stud Vienna's Ringstrasse as well as with the recently restored Dresden Opera House that now bears his name. But, as Mallgrave demonstrates, Semper was also in direct contact (and often in open conflict) with many of the century's preeminent personalities, including Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Jacob Burckhardt, Kaiser Franz Josef, "Mad" King Ludwig of Bavaria, Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Jakob Moleschott, Gottfried Keller, Henry Cole, and many others. In fact, Mallgrave's detailed account of his contribution to the formation of Nietzsche's and Wagner's aesthetic doctrines will once again thrust Semper to center stage in the emergence of German modernism.

Mallgrave's account of Semper's achievement corrects many common misconceptions. In the first place, he shows that—at the hands of a master like Semper, anyway—historicism as practiced in the mid- and late nineteenth century was hardly a pedantic, formulaic application of the decorative trappings of past styles. In place of this persistent but flawed view, Mallgrave presents Semper vigorously confronting and transforming the conventions of architectural

2 John Jones's *Shakespeare at Work* (Oxford, 1995) is the best study of this topic to date, including a detailed discussion of Hand D. Unfortunately, he merely asserts, in a footnote, his scepticism about Shakespeare's hand in *Ironside*.

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expression to accommodate changing programmatic, iconographic, and theoretical demands. Semper's contributions and the related developments that followed in their wake constitute the inadequately understood body of work against which so many modernists ultimately revolted.

Yet Semper's elevated spirit of renewal and improvement so suffuses high modernism that we have grown averse to perceiving its occurrence in previous generations. Avoiding the exhausted method of trying to interpret Semper's architecture in light of his theory (or vice versa), Mallgrave reexamines each aspect independently and establishes a new analytical standard for understanding Semper's achievements. The most important breakthrough comes in his analysis of Semper's "theatricality" and its relationship to Friedrich Schinkel's dramatic neoclassicism. Mallgrave allows us once again to appreciate Semper's elegantly modeled urban monuments as worthy exemplars of the classical tradition.

Mallgrave's performance also reminds us how rare biographies written according to traditional standards have become. Doctrinaire postmodernists are quick to poohpooh biography as an invalid literary undertaking because, as Foucauldians repeatedly chide us, the idea of the individual itself has perhaps come to an end. Mallgrave's evident labor, his methodically patient examination of an enormous quantity of primary documents in several languages, his insistence on visiting all of Semper's monuments and every potentially helpful archive, as well as his complete mastery of the secondary literature, are all habits of mind that remain utterly alien to the postmodernist. And the result is a biography as readable as it is revelatory.

As is often the case, however, those who would most likely benefit from reading Mallgrave's *Semper* are probaby the least likely to crack its covers: Semper—or more precisely a posthumous mistranslation of his thought—was criticized shortly after his death for the kind of materialist preoccupations obsessing the academic architectural profession today. Much of the impetus for what we now recognize as the academic study of architectural history took shape either in deference to or as a reaction against Gottfried Semper's wide-ranging theoretical activities. In this respect, biographical detail gives the reader a sturdy toehold for appreciating the more abstract dimensions of Semper's thought. To know that Semper was the kind of man who was observed one evening in the early 1840s dejectedly skipping rocks off the façade of his first Dresden Hoftheater may not illuminate much about his theory or his practice, but it does illustrate his choleric temperament. It was this cantankerousness, even crankiness, that ultimately caused much of Semper's personal and professional difficulties. As Mallgrave demonstrates, without the chain of unfortunate events precipitated by his role in the 1849 Dresden uprising, Semper might not have been forced to reconsider theoretical matters during the long years of his mid-career exile in Paris and London.

Semper's theory is as difficult as it is popular. His prose style strains even native speakers, and Semper's wide-ranging interests touched on the latest findings in archeology, ethnology, philology, technology, aesthetics, and higher mathematics as well as pertinent developments in the sister arts. Although the sheer scope of Semper's interests was not sufficient to deter generations of historians from approaching his body of theory, no one was willing to take responsibility for this vast scholarly terrain. Scholars of the very highest caliber, including the late Wolfgang Herrmann, were only able to digest relatively small portions of Semper's incredibly rich theoretical outpourings. And while Mallgrave's book is dedicated to the memory of Herrmann and his wife, in many respects he has surpassed his mentor.

The bulk of Semper's mature theory is set forth in the two stout volumes of *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten, oder praktische Aesthetik* (1860–63), the fruit of

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an agonizingly protracted publishing effort whose origins and development Mallgrave patiently chronicles. His poise in balancing the biographer's task with that of the analytical historian is most evident here. And I suspect that it was Mallgrave's concern with biographical issues that enabled him to break through the conventional logjam of viewing Semper's theory as a function of the interplay between Semper's novel themes: the so-called theory of dressing (*Bekleidungstheorie*), the theory of architecture's four elements, and the theory of material transformation (*Stoffwechseltheorie*). Instead, Mallgrave takes a few paces back in order to consider the overall cultural sweep of Semper's lifelong interests and presents him as a first-rate metaphysician of architecture.

Semper was consumed with the interplay between appearances and essences, and to the extent that appearances reveal essences, architecture quite literally becomes a grand stage for civic *Bildung*. Despite the modern appeal of certain features of his earlier polychrome-based theories ("brick should appear as brick, iron as iron" and so on), Semper stridently advocated an architecture of shimmering, ornamentally encrusted surfaces. For him, style was not a function of tectonic rigor or strict conformity of material to function, but rather an almost fractal splendor by which the symbolic and tectonic realms resonate throughout a building's, or even a precinct's, overall design.

A shining example is Semper's plan for the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna: iconographically, the building functions as a clock that, reading clockwise of course, presents the history of art chronologically along each façade. Vertically, the building also tells the evolutionary tale of the emergence of raw crafts to their mastery by great individual artists. The tectonic overlay, of increasing refinement from rugged lithic referentiality to delicate fenestration, shows the architect as the coordinator of this magnificent artistic-historical trajectory, all in service to the House of Hapsburg. The Kunsthistorisches is mirrored by the Naturhistorisches Museum, which taken with the

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New Hofburg, forms but a torso of his grandiose plan for an immensely complex and iconographically rich Imperial Forum.

Mallgrave traces this pulsing urban scenography to Semper's theater projects, beginning with the aborted Dresden Forum and continuing through the ill-fated plans for a Munich *Festspieltheater* for Richard Wagner. Semper prided himself as a theater architect first and foremost. His pivotal insights on the nature of art, the choragic role of the architect, and the literalness of architecture's primordial symbolism clarify his appeal first to Wagner, and through him, to the young Nietzsche. Indeed Semper's taut balance of realism and idealism moved Wilhelm Dilthey to call him "the true successor to Goethe." But Semper's efforts were, in a sense, sabotaged by the pedantry of his admirers. On the one hand, Semper's theories were hailed within the academy as a foundational text for the history of art, especially the applied arts. In this respect, Semper's success as a realist endowed the new discipline with a methodology for dating the minor works of remote antiquity, primarily pottery and metalwork. At the same time, because Semper never wrote the third and final volume of *Der Stil*, the volume dedicated to architecture per se, the material that would have rounded out Semper's realism was never presented to the public. To compound the matter, when his sons brought out a posthumous collection of shorter writings in 1884, a critical lecture from the London years was translated in such a way that made Semper appear to be an unvarnished materialist. The dilemma between Semper as realist and Semper as idealist was brought to a close just after the turn of the century when the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl pegged him as the father of "materialist metaphysics." Mallgrave ends his book with a sustained examination of the Semper-Riegl problem and demonstrates, with great subtlety, the magnitude of Riegl's intellectual debt to Semper.

After being considered second only to Schinkel as Germany's most accomplished architect for over a generation, Semper fell from grace among the community of professional architects. Again, the realist seeds Semper planted in the 1860s sprouted into ideas that eventually undermined his own metaphysics. From Josef Bayer's aesthetic of structural evolution of the 1880s, to Otto Wagner's emphasis on developing a modern ornament in the 1890s, to Adolf Loos's preoccupation with the absence of ornament in the 1900s—each defined his modernity as an honest disagreement with the venerable old Semper. By 1910, Semper was perceived to be the antithesis of architectural greatness and so it remained until the mid-1970s and the emergence of a cottage industry in Semper scholarship. That all of Semper's writings are once again in print over a century after his death testifies to their enduring significance. Thanks to Mallgrave's study, without doubt the finest in any language, this incandescent figure can finally be appreciated and Germany's sonorous voice in the great fugue binding the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has become more defined.

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Notebook

Dumas "fils"

by Louis Auchincloss

There are occasional events and personages in French history that make one wonder whether the nation can ever be fully understood by a foreigner. One such is the Dreyfus affair. That a man should be falsely condemned for espionage is not in itself so strange—what country has not witnessed the miscarriage of justice? But that the people of the supposed most cultivated of nations should be so divided by the effort to rehabilitate the accused that a goodly portion of its conservative element should wish the conviction to stand *even if* it were proven wrong seems something that could not happen, at least in the United Kingdom or the United States. We had our Sacco and Vanzetti, but did even those furthest to the right wish to see innocent men electrocuted? If any did, they were careful not to say so. Yet in France there were many who did not hesitate to voice the opinion that the reputation of the army had to be maintained, even at the cost of injustice to one of its officers. A soldier can be asked to die for his country: should he not be willing to be disgraced for it?

No! is our resounding answer. Perhaps because we haven't that much faith in the army. Perhaps because we haven't that much faith in anything. But does the Dreyfus case make us want that kind of faith?

On the literary side, the huge theatrical celebrity of Alexandre Dumas *fils* (1824–1895) in his lifetime is another case in point. As André Maurois put in his biography of the father and son:

> It is difficult for us today to realize the precise nature of the position occupied by Dumas *fils* in the Paris of the 'eighties. Not only was he all powerful in the theatre; he also dominated the Academy. The president of France would send for him to his box to congratulate him after a performance. A Dumas *fils* first night had become an event of national importance.

And what is left today of the plays that entranced the French capital during four decades? Only *La Dame aux camélias*, and that mostly in its operatic and cinematic versions, *La Traviata* and *Camille*. And what is left of the author's lofty preachments and stern moralizing about adultery and prostitution? Only Henry James's beautiful description of the love affair in *La Dame*:

> It is all champagne and tears—fresh perversity, fresh credulity, fresh passion, fresh pain. We have seen it both well done and ill done, and perhaps more particularly the latter—in strange places, in barbarous tongues, with Marguerite Gautier fat and Armand Duval old. I remember ages ago in Boston a version in which this young lady and this young gentleman were represented as "engaged": that indeed for all I know may still be the form in which the piece most finds favor with the Anglo-Saxon public. Nothing makes any

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> difference—it carries with it an April air: some tender young man and some coughing young woman have only to speak the lines to give it a great place among the love stories of the world.

James added immediately to this effusion: "If I have stopped to be myself so much reminded, it is because after and outside of *La Dame aux camélias*, Dumas never really figured among us again." By "us" he meant himself and his American cousins, but he might as well have included the whole of the Anglo-Saxon world. "We like to be good; the French like to be better. We like to be moral; they like to moralize."

There was a marked and indeed much publicized difference between Dumas's life and his preaching. His tumultuous love life included many adulteries, and, a bitter bastard himself, he fathered at least one natural child. Such flagrant inconsistency may be attributed in large part to the major role that his magnificent but prodigal father played in his life. Dumas *père* was simply impossible. He gave his son every reason to resent and despise him—and then charmed him out of his resentment. He allowed his son to bear the social stigma of bastardy, though nothing but caste prejudice prevented him from marrying his mistress; and then tore the child, at the tender age of seven, from the arms of his loving mother by force of law and sent him to a pension, where he was scorned for his irregular birth. Yet the child could never sustain his anger against a parent so exuberant, so charming, so willing to admit faults, so famous, so popular, so wildly generous—in a word, so overwhelming. As Maurois put it: "The father was bursting with health; the son frequently suffered from physical and mental crises which at times even threatened his reason. The father, in spite of his many disappointments, remained an optimist to the end; the son, in spite of much precocious success, died a pessimist."

The son was not even allowed the grudge of being eclipsed as a writer by his best-selling father. Dumas *père* was immensely proud of the brilliant boy, and nobody applauded more vociferously at the crashing success of *La Dame*, when the son was still in his twenties, than the world-renowned author of *Monte Cristo*. Dumas *fils* was welcomed, so to speak, to the family dais.

However much the son may have disapproved of the paternal follies and extravagances, he found himself drawn to a similar pattern of life. "My boy," the older man reminded him solemnly, "when one has the honor to bear the name Dumas, one lives on a grand scale: one dines at the Café de Paris, and one never says no to a pleasure."

The son had his famous affair with Marie Duplessis when he was only twenty-one. He described his camellia lady as "one of the last of those rare courtesans who had a heart," but the cost of a single evening with her was enough to ruin the young Alexandre. Though already suffering from the consumption that was to kill her, she was kept by millionaires and spent a hundred thousand gold francs in a year. Yet it was he, and not she, as in the popular novel he wrote about her (before turning it into an even more popular play), who broke it off. "My dear Marie, I am neither rich enough to love you as I would wish, nor poor enough to be loved by you as you would." He could not afford her alone, and he refused any longer to share her with others.

Two facts—one, that this affair had introduced him to the greatest ecstasy of his life, and two, that his written interpretation of it had brought him fame and fortune—must have given food for bitter rumination to a mind so lashed by conscience. As he grew more familiar with the Paris world of fashion, he became increasingly disgusted with it, until it began to take on for him the dimensions if a modern Babylon, which it was his manifest duty to admonish and correct. His dramas in the next three decades, however ingeniously plotted and suspenseful, however scintillating with wit and epigrams, and however powerful, were nonetheless sermons that his audiences adored

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without feeling any need to apply them to their daily lives. Henry James has well described them:

> He is exuberantly sincere: his good faith sometimes obscures his humor, but nothing obscures his good faith. So he gives us in their order the unworthy brides who must be denounced, the prenuptial children who must be adopted, the natural sons who must be avenged, the wavering ladies who must be saved, the credulous fiancés who must be enlightened, the profligate wives who must be shot, the merely blemished ones who must be forgiven, the too vindictive ones who must be humored, the venal young men who must be exposed, the unfaithful husbands who must be frightened, the frivolous fathers who must be pulled up and the earnest sons who must pull them.

Life, in short, presented itself to Dumas "as a battle between the woman and the man."

Young men in the Second Empire, he argued, had become hard; the women provocative. The father in *Un Père prodigue* says of the son's generation: "Your heart has no use for conquests—only acquisitions. If by some chance a woman of any distinction should fall in love with you, she must yield her body as fast as another would sell it. Young men, young men, you have killed love!" But hear the son on the opposite sex: "Women's shame has evaporated with the décolleté gown. You don't realize that the murmur of admiration that greets the sight of your bare shoulders is an insult in disguise."

What is the answer to this war of the sexes? Dumas was clear: a love marriage between a sexually experienced male and a virgin.

> No woman, however beautiful or well-loved, can give to her love the hundredth part of the emotion which in a single moment a husband receives from the young bride he has chosen when love is first revealed to her. His heart and spirit find in that first expansion of a timid, unknowing but still curious soul a sensation so absolute that it destroys everything that is not she, so complete that it can never be duplicated.

Mightn't that "still curious" have indicated to Dumas that there was something wrong with his formula? The idea that it may have been unfair to require that one, and not both, of the spouses be virginal would not have occurred to many of his contemporaries, but shouldn't it have occurred to so fierce a moralist? And we shall see that in time it did.

His greater leniency for men was based, of course, on his belief, then almost universally held, that sexual promiscuity was a natural, even a normal condition for a young male, but not for a female. A man might boast, even complacently, that he had to exercise strong will to curb his lusts; a woman would be most indiscreet to do so. One can imagine Dumas's shrug on learning of a state of sustained virginity in a young male adult: "Quelle espèce de pédéraste!" Even the righteous and God-fearing father of Armand Duval, in *La Dame aux camélias*, asserts: "Il faut que tout jeune homme ait une maîtresse." Note the "il faut." There are no ifs or buts about it. The only crime would be in *marrying* the mistress. So prostitution is built into the social system, like slavery in the old American South, and the moral code must be adapted to accept it. The fatal crack that this causes in the code did not appear to Dumas until near the end of his life.

If the woman accepted her status as a prostitute and did not aspire to become a wife, she might be redeemable, like the lady of the camellias, who, after all, had a heart. But she was rare. Dumas added a note to his novel: "It is not my conclusion that all prostitutes would have behaved as did Marguerite." More typical to his mind, no doubt, was Suzanne d'Ange, the demi-mondaine of *Le Demi-Monde*, who is determined at any cost to achieve social respectability by marrying a besotted young army

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officer who is ignorant of her tarnished past. In this she is frustrated by the hero, Olivier de Jalin, a friend of her proposed victim, who to outwit her uses every trick in the pack *except* the revelation of their own old affair—which his honor, suddenly fastidious, prohibits. Perhaps due to a suspicion that at least some of his audience might sympathize with an unfortunate woman trying to better herself, Dumas makes Suzanne a good deal wickeder than the situation really requires. Henry James pointed this out:

> It is the means that Olivier uses that excite the wonderment of the Anglo-Saxon spectator. He takes the ground that in such a cause all means are fair, and when, at the climax of the play, he tells a thumping lie in order to make Madame d'Ange compromise herself, expose herself, he is pronounced by the author "*le plus honnête homme que je connais.*" Madame d'Ange, as I have said, is a superior woman; the interest of the play is in her being a superior woman. Olivier has been her lover; he himself is one of the reasons why she may not marry Nanjac; he has given her a push down the downward path. But it is curious how little this is held by the author to disqualify him from fighting the battle in which she is so much the weaker combatant.

When Dumas came to write *La Femme de Claude*, he threw all restraint to the winds and created a woman so vile, not only in her ruthless promiscuity but in her betrayal of her nation to an enemy, that the hero, her husband, is justified in shooting her dead. Dumas answered his critics in a pamphlet more violent than his play:

> Women never listen to reason; not even to proof. When they do surrender it is always to feelings or to force. They must be either in love or cowed; either Juliet or Martine! Nothing else is of the slightest interest to them. I am writing, therefore, for the instruction of the male. If, after this revelation of the truth, men still persist in making mistakes about women, it will no longer be my fault, and I shall do as Pilate did . . .

Was there, then, no way for a woman with a past to start again? Well, yes. In *Les Idées de Madame Aubray*, a woman has borne an illegitimate child but who has ever since lived a life of the strictest modesty, virtue, and seclusion is permitted at last by a matron of broad social views to wed the matron's noble-minded son.

Toward the end of his life Dumas began to have some mild sense of the impossibility of any strict application of his views. He had published his plays in an edition in which each piece was harnessed to a lengthy preface announcing its moral, which Henry James had likened to going to a dinner party accompanied by a pair of constables. But now he began to see that the trouble lay quite as much with his men as his women. If the lust of man had created prostitution, then man must learn to contain his lust. Why had Christ conquered the world, he asked his friend Léopold Lacour.

"Because He died on the cross for preaching a doctrine of universal charity and love."

"No doubt, but chiefly because the preacher of love died a virgin."

And his next play, which he didn't live to write, was to have been called *L'Homme vierge*.

It would have made him at least consistent. But Shakespeare knew that the idea could be dramatized only in comedy. In *Measure for Measure* the Viennese law against fornication is seen to be unenforceable.

Today we have liberated both sexes, morally as well as legally. People may do anything they desire, so long as they are of age and consent; they needn't marry, and they needn't stay married. Our freedom has engendered other problems, of course. Even animals fight in the mating season. But at least we're not hypocrites.

Has there ever been a society that espoused Dumas's ideals? Perhaps the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1640s. I submit this complacent passage from the journal of Governor John Winthrop.

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At this court of assistants one James Britten, a man ill affected both to our church discipline and civil government, and one Mary Latham, a young woman about 18 years of age, whose father was a godly man and brought her up well, were condemned to die for adultery, upon a law formerly made and published in print. This woman being rejected by a young man whom she had an affection unto, vowed she would marry the next man that came to her, and accordingly, against her friends' minds, she matched with an ancient man who had neither honesty nor ability, and one whom she had no affection unto; whereupon soon after she was married, divers young men solicited her chastity, and drawing her into bad company, and giving her wine and other gifts, easily prevailed with her, and among others this Britten, but God smiting him with a dread palsy and fearful conscience withal, he could not keep secret, but discovered this.

The woman proved very penitent and had deep apprehension of the foulness of her sin. The man was very much cast down for his sins but was loth to die and petitioned for his life, but they would not grant it, though some of the magistrates questioned whether adultery was death by God's law. They were both executed; and died very penitently, especially the woman, who had some comfortable hope of pardon for her sin, and gave good exhortation to all young maids to be obedient to their parents and to take heed of evil company.

John Winthrop does not seem to have been afflicted with any of the doubts of Dumas *fils*. But at least his serenity spared him from going to such extremes as did the French dramatist when he blamed the defeat of France by Prussia in 1870 on the prevalence of prostitution in Paris!

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Letters

On "Partisan Review"

To the Editors:
In his interesting remarks on *A Partisan Century*, an anthology of political writing from *Partisan Review* (September 1996), Hilton Kramer regrets that two articles he especially disliked, one by Professor Richard Poirier and the other by Susan Sontag, were not included. These, in his view, were evidence for a deplorable if temporary alignment of the *Partisan Review* with the ideas of the Left in the Sixties and Seventies. The alignment did occur. I'm sorry that Mr. Kramer did not recall that it was anticipated by my article in *Partisan Review* in 1962, "The Coming End of Anti-Communism."

William Phillips has said that he incurred a great deal of recrimination for publishing an article which now may strike many as prescient. In 1971, nonetheless, he did me the honor of naming me to the journal's editorial board, a post from which I was dismissed in 1983. If memory is correct, Mr. Phillips told me that my simultaneous memberships on the editorial boards of *The Nation* and *Partisan Review* constituted evidence for insufficient attachment to the liberal and pluralistic values of the West. I would have thought that the opposite conclusion was plausible but hasten to add that I derived large amounts of pleasure and profit from my association with *Partisan Review* and with Mr. Phillips, whom I greatly admire. In the event, my departure was clearly an aspect of the political realignment so congenial to Mr. Kramer.

I'm represented in the anthology by a piece I did with the late Professor Christopher Lasch, "America Today: An Exchange," and am very glad to have it included. The article of 1962 would have been more representative of the exceedingly mixed temper of a very complex period: I can understand Mr. Kramer's complaint.

Norman Birnbaum
Georgetown University Law Center
Washington, D.C.

Merrill's "b o d y"

To the Editors:
I am writing in response to John Simon's review of *The Best American Poetry 1996* (September 1996). The review is objectionable on so many points that a full response would equal it in length, so I limit myself to the pivotal paragraphs, in which Mr. Simon embarrasses himself by analyzing James Merrill's poem "b o d y."

You will note the spacing between the letters in the poem's title. Mr. Simon doesn't—and consequently imagines that the "actor onstage" in the poem is "the printed word *body*." In fact, in Merrill's little meditation on mortality, which focuses on the spelling of the word *body*, the figure who enters "(stage right)," then "float[s] full," and then "head[s] off" stage left is the letter *o*. That is: the letter *o* appears conjoined to the vertical line (or the wing) in the letter *b*, then separates itself, like the full moon rising, and so emerges as *o*, and finally heads off to contact the vertical line (the other wing) in the letter *d*.

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What could be clearer? In his impatience, Mr. Simon misses the point and puts himself in the ludicrous position of wondering in public, "Why 'moon' rather than 'eye'?" and amusing himself with the term "bod." Having worked up his head of steam, he proceeds to ask with a sneer "how can [the letter] *y* knock unanswered on the stage door?" The reply to his question is included in his own paraphrase: the letter *y* is "unanswered" because the basic question of life and death (*y* = "why?") cannot *be* answered. The question involves a pun that most schoolchildren would "get," but its answer doesn't exist within the playhouse, the poet's arena.

Mr. Simon accuses Merrill of dropping his stage metaphor after line six. Now, shifting metaphors has never been unconscionable in a poem of any length, *pace* Mr. Simon's philistine dictum that such a change "undercut[s] the efficacy of a short poem demanding cohesion." But Merrill does not drop the metaphor. He just continues to be too subtle for Mr. Simon. Even as Merrill acknowledges a modulation in the metaphor when he says that "Looked at too long, words fail,/ phase out," he dims the lights in his theater. Stagelights, like moonlight, can come and go. Like moonlight, and indeed like the individual life itself, which is of course the little *o* (within the Shakespearean "little O" of the playhouse) that crosses the stage and then is seen no more when it exits and the lights go out. Once "*body* shines/ no longer," the poet must ask "by what light" the reader can "learn these lines." That phrase extends the acting motif, even as it implies that the reader is an actor who "plots her course." And the poem's last line? Mr Simon, who cannot imagine why "the loss of *b* and *d* [is] more lamentable than that of *o* and *y*," concludes sniffily that "a compelling poem clicks into place." Leaving aside the dubious dogmatism of that rule, I must point out that Mr. Simon is blind to the poem's intimation that *b* and *d* "stood for" *b*irth and *d*eath. From *b*irth to *d*eath, life is a cipher, manifest in the intervening *o*. The "light you learn these lines" by, since it is not of the body, must be of what survives the body. Merrill died before his poem appeared in the anthology, and it is now chiefly by its own light that the poem must be read. *Click*. But of course there is a sense in which each reader, including the most benighted, must read by his or her own lights.

I would like to turn to the aspersions that Mr. Simon casts upon Merrill's prosody by pointing out that anyone whose prosodic acuity were of the caliber that Mr. Simon pretends his own is would notice that Merrill's stanzas as quoted in the anthology are asymmetrical. As Mr. Simon quotes the poem, it has two stanzas, each five lines, rhyming *abxca dbccd*. While there's nothing "wrong" with that scheme, any open-minded reader familiar with Merrill's poems and alert to both the aberrant indentation in the fourth line of the first stanza and the seemingly unrhymed third line would suspect a misprint. This reader, reviewing an anthology rather than the poet's own final thoughts, would check the poem against the text as it appears in its original publication—or as it appears in *A Scattering of Salts*, Merrill's posthumous volume, and would discover that line three's "soon," meant to end its line, rhymes with line four's "moon," just as line eight's "shines" rhymes with line nine's "lines." Merrill's interlocking rhyme scheme is *abcca dbccd*.

About Merrill's metrics, Simon says, with the certainty that the child's game conveys upon him, that Merrill's "lines two, five, and eight barely comply" with the poem's putative norm, "iambic tetrameter," while "lines three and six" comply "not at all." This claim is—there is no other word for it (no, wait, there *are* several other words)—balderdash. Line two—"entering (stage right), then floating full"—is iambic tetrameter, with the substitution of a trochee in the first foot, as long as one understands the history of English prosody and the elision of the second syllable in "entering." Mr. Simon distinguishes himself by not recognizing the tradition he feigns to defend. Line five is unarguably iambic tetrameter, and line eight contains one common substitution: after the first caesura, a trochee for an iamb. Line six, the only unusual line in the poem, still begins with three iambs, cagily disguised by the syntax, and concludes with a pyrrhic and a spondee: the sharp "knock" is "heard" in the last two accents. A pentameter line, it is "unanswered" by the others, which are either tetrameter or trimeter.

The problem is not that Mr. Simon cares more

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about prosody than Merrill but that Mr. Simon is after all these years a neophyte, whose idea of an iambic tetrameter line is di-DUM di-DUM di-DUM di-DUM. I am astonished that a publication with your reputation for appreciation of tradition and precision would accept such a shoddy review, which is ill-educated or mean-spirited or both.

Stephen Yenser
Department of English
University of California
Los Angeles, Cal.

John Simon replies:

First, I concede that after pondering Mr. Yenser's *explication de texte*, I am persuaded by it, and consider his analysis both astute and, in the main, definitive. One might merely object that in "plots her course" no female reader is implied, the "her" referring simply to the protagonist-moon.

On the matter of scansion, I do have some disagreement. It is, of course, unfortunate that so reputable an anthology bearing the names of David Lehman and Adrienne Rich should have reprinted the poem so faultily. Still, a reviewer cannot be expected to check the original version of each of the many poems he quotes for possible textual discrepancies. Something did strike me as odd, but because, until now, *A Scattering of Salts* was not among the six or seven volumes of Merrill in my library, I assumed that the poet was striving for deliberate irregularity.

I am not, however, quite the tyro Mr. Yenser takes me for. I have, in my youth, published poetry in some reputable journals, and am even included in a couple of anthologies. If Mr. Yenser practiced what he preaches, he could have ascertained this. About shifting metaphors being permissible even in a short poem, I can only adduce Wystan Auden's cavil at a sonnet of mine where, in a wintry setting, I had a trope involving ants: "There are no ants in winter!"

Mr. Yenser seems to see nothing odd about a ten-line poem that suddenly introduces pentameter amid trimeter and tetrameter lines. I do. But this is a matter of personal preference, to which I, like him, may be entitled. As for trochees replacing iambs at the beginning of a verse or after a caesura, that is a device I myself have made steady use of. I do, however, have problems with a dactyl followed by an iamb in a tetrameter line (and I don't think a modern poet should presume to elide the second *e* in "entering"); also with a pyrrhic followed by a spondee for no compelling reason. If onomatopoeia was intended, it should come at "knocks," not at "stage door." Yet these, I suppose, are questions of taste, of which Mr. Yenser clearly has oodles, and I have none.

That makes me wonder why Mr. Yenser sees the need to pepper his letter with, I think, eighteen crass insults. (I say "I think" because my faith in my aptitude for close reading has been rudely shaken, and I may have overlooked some.) But the answer is in the dedication of *A Scattering of Salts*: "For Stephen Yenser." As the poet's close friend, muse, or whatever, he *would* become enraged at any imagined slight.

In point of fact, though, I have been an acquaintance and admirer of James Merrill's over the years, and have even visited in his house in Stonington. I have in my possession a handwritten postcard from the poet, dated 22.2.67, which begins, "I want to thank you for your thoughtful review of my play. . . . I have come to share most of your opinions on the subject," and continues in a similarly friendly vein. Again, in the November 1, 1961, issue of *Vogue*, in an article on modern poets, I was one of the early champions of Merrill's poetry in the mass media. So even if I unjustly underrated one Merrill poem, I may not quite have merited the loose cannonballs with which Mr. Yenser showers me.

When all is said and done, I still don't consider "b o d y" one of Merrill's finest efforts, though clearly superior to his Ouija-board poems, on which, to my mind, he squandered so much of his talant. For me, "b o d y" is too precious, too concettist by half: a piece of epigonous Metaphysical verse closer to Marino than to Marvell or Donne. Even so, no rational reader of my review would assume that one unsuccessful poem queers an entire extensive and distinguished *oeuvre*; at most it may cast some doubt on the judiciousness of the anthologist who chose it.

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- **D** **Otto Bettman:** *The Good Old Days: They Were Terrible* (55 min.)
- **E** **Nathaniel Branden:** *Dealing With the Gifted Child* (48 min.)
- **F** **Carlos Castaneda:** *Don Juan: The Sorcerer* (38 min.)
- **G** **Alistair Cooke:** *America: An Outside View* (55 min.)
- **H** **Edward De Bono:** *How to Change Ideas* (55 min.)
- **I** **Erich Fromm:** *To Have or to Be: The Nature of the Psyche* (56 min.)
- **J** **Robert Frost:** *An Evening with Robert Frost* (55 min.)
- **K** **Buckminster Fuller:** *Twentieth-Century Renaissance* (55 min.)
- **L** **Thor Heyerdahl:** *Waters of the World* (58 min.)
- **M** **Gilbert Highet:** *The Art of Invective/A Bouquet of Poison Ivy* (30 min.)
- **N** **Sir Edmund Hillary:** *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win* (55 min.)
- **O** **G. Wilson Knight:** *Shakespeare and the English Language* (30 min.)
- **P** **Robert Lowell:** *Reads and Discusses His Poetry* (28 min.)
- **Q** **Joseph Mazzeo:** *The Idea of Progress: Science and Poetry* (46 min.)
- **R** **Ashley Montagu:** *The Nature of Human Nature* (48 mn.)
- **S** **Edwin Newman:** *Decline and Fall of American Language* (55 min.)
- **T** **J. Robert Oppenheimer:** *Relevance of Literature to Science* (19 min.)
- **U** **Asimov & Pohl:** *Science Fiction: The Early Days* (55 min.)
- **V** **William Saroyan:** *The Real World of the Writer* (48 min.)
- **W** **Upton Sinclair:** *A Pen to Change America* (40 min.)
- **X** **Stephen Spender:** *T.S. Eliot and George Orwell* (41 min.)
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